

OVER 300 **PS4 & VITA** GAMES RATED INSIDE

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SPIDER-MAN

Insomniac takes us inside 2018's biggest PlayStation 4 exclusive



PLUS ANTHEM • DYING LIGHT 2 • CONTROL • THE CREW 2
RESIDENT EVIL 2 • ASSASSIN'S CREED ODYSSEY • FORTNITE: BATTLE ROYALE • WARFACE

PS4 PS VR PS3 VITA PSN Welcome **PLAY**

A closer look at all of the best games on the horizon



GREATNESS AWAITS



THIS IS THE second time that **Play Digital** has featured Insomniac's *Spider-Man* on the cover in the last 12 months. That isn't something that I would usually encourage... there are, after all, plenty of games deserving to be on the cover of this magazine. Here's the thing, I just couldn't turn down the opportunity to sit down with the creative director of 2018's biggest PlayStation 4 exclusive, *Spider-Man*.

Truth be told, it is deserving of all of the attention it is receiving. This is the game that so many of us have spent decades waiting to play. Sure, the likes of Treyarch and Beenox have had their moments, but never before have I seen a game that so confidently captures the essence of the character – not as excellently as this, at least. The web-swinging feels intuitive, the combat is expressive and the writing seems to be pitch-perfect; this is a *Spider-Man* game made by the fans, for the fans.

Insomniac take us inside the development of its largest open-world game to date, revealing fresh gameplay details alongside a ton of new information about the story and the cast of characters you can expect to meet along the way. If you're a Spidey fan you're going to want to sit down and spend some time pouring over this month's cover feature.

If you *aren't* a fan of *Spider-Man* (oh no... you're one of those DC fans, aren't you?), don't worry, we've got plenty in these pages to keep you entertained. We've previewed some of 2019's hottest games – the likes of *Anthem*, *Control* and *Resident Evil 2 Remake*. We sat down with the team behind the upcoming free-to-play FPS, *Warface*, and we got our hands all over EA's incredible new entry to the FIFA series, *FIFA 19*. If you're looking for recommendations on what you should be playing right this very second, we've also detailed one of the best indie games of 2018 and reviewed the hottest new triple-A games.

With *Spider-Man* on the near horizon and a slew of excellent games to follow soon after, we've certainly got a really exciting few months ahead of us. I'm so happy that I get to be your guide through it all.

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CURRENTLY PLAYING
DEAD CELLS

PLAY^{PS} Contents

The future of PlayStation gaming looks something like this...

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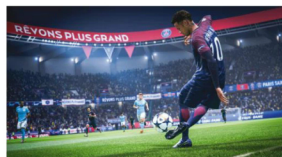
Does Ubisoft's latest open-world racer deliver?



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Peer into the development of an under-appreciated PlayStation classic.



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ETA 22 FEB 2019 | PUB EA | DEV BIOWARE

Anthem

BioWare is back to its best



We try to not make a habit of judging the progression of toolsets within the videogame industry against

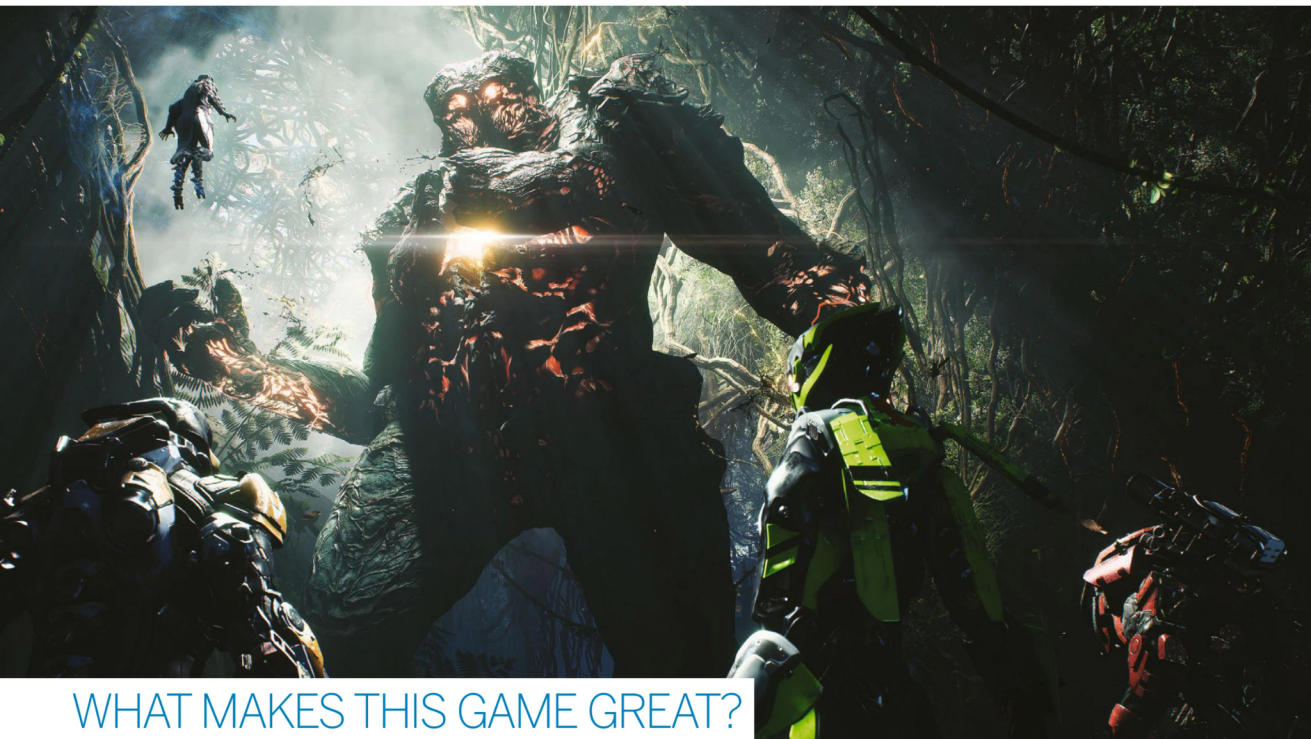
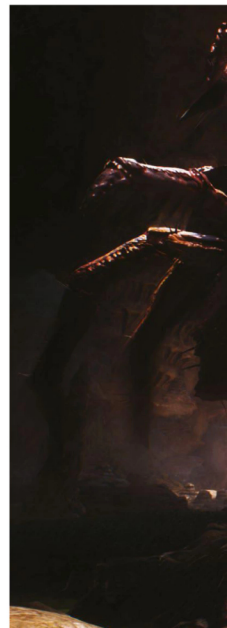
what a special effects team is capable of in the film industry, though in this instance we are willing to make a small exception. It's been ten years; ten long years since *Iron Man* made its debut, introducing us to exoskeleton flight suits that moved with such fluidity and grace on screen that never once did we question their plausibility. That effect never quite made it to gaming, but we have to believe that developers and engineers were watching closely. Quietly experimenting

with the mechanics and systems that would not only allow for seamless transitions between ground and aerial movement in a human-sized combat vehicle, but for it to feel comfortable and weighted underneath your fingertips too.

Regardless of whether it was an intentional aspiration for BioWare or not, *Anthem* is perhaps the first game to properly deliver on the dream. Movement is the star of *Anthem*. The suits allow for tight and tempered navigation within the sprawling open spaces the studio has engineered, and exploration is to be as key to the experience as combat; each of the Javelin suits are expressive, designed to be

distinct at a distance and hugely customisable. The execution of the systems is key in bringing tactility and tactical opportunity to play – perfect for fending off the swarms of creatures that inhabit large parts of the planet we will likely call home for years to come.

BioWare deserves great praise for what it has revealed thus far and the manner in which it has done it in. *Anthem* is a shared-world shooter with deep RPG systems, built around a customisation economy that exists to encourage rummaging through the ashes of the recently deceased. The comparisons to *Destiny* were to be expected – if not entirely inevitable in the current climate – and we can



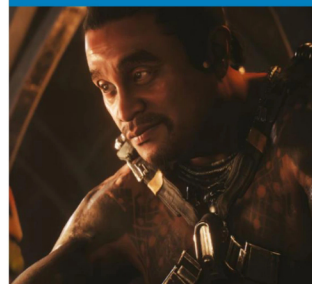
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- ▲ BioWare clearly has a point to prove as it looks to leave *Andromeda* behind
- *Anthem* is a shared-world shooter done right... sorry *Destiny*, it just isn't working out
- ✗ This is a game made for fans of *Iron Man*. The suit flying looks absolutely amazing
- With a planned release window of early 2019, there isn't long to wait now



△××△ *Anthem* is a shared-world shooter from the team behind *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*. Designed to be played in co-op or solo, BioWare hopes to bring its talents in the RPG space to the popular online-connected third-person shooter genre.

SOLO PLAY



While *Anthem* is indeed designed around co-op, BioWare has promised that the game can still be enjoyed as a single-player experience. That's important to the studio; its legacy is in single-player design, and it wasn't about to leave that behind. It might look like a third-person shooter, but the team behind the title is indeed still pushing to bring heavy RPG elements into play to ensure that the game will work no matter the composition of your party. We are yet to see how this works in practice, although early indications suggest that boss battles and enemy numbers may indeed scale with character level and numbers. Still, with a 2019 release date still a number of months away, there is plenty of time for BioWare to work out the details.

"THE SUITS ALLOW FOR TIGHT AND TEMPERED NAVIGATION WITHIN THE SPRAWLING OPEN SPACES THE STUDIO HAS ENGINEERED."

only applaud the way in which the studio has handled itself in this respect.

While it's currently impossible to speak to how well BioWare is delivering on its loftiest promise: that of bringing its proficiency in nuanced storytelling to the shared-world shooter experience – an area in which new-found rival Bungie has struggled with no end – we do have a sense of how excellently the other elements are coming together to form a cohesive whole. Alongside the exquisite movement systems and the seamless transitions between land, air and, impressively, the underwater ecosystems presented thus far, we're also beginning to get a sense of just how proficient the studio has become in realising third-person action.

Shooting had, arguably, always been the weakest part of the *Mass Effect* series, although the team finally seems to have a handle on it for *Anthem*. In presenting combat spaces that demand free-form tactical play and teamwork to make light work of a variety of impressively driven enemy combatants, we see this laid out clearly. Each Javelin suit comes equipped with an array of basic weaponry to complement the particular models – some wielding heavier weapons that groan into

action as you squeeze the triggers, and others that handle peppier firearms that jilt and jolt as you quickly unleash shots. What we're trying to say is that the third-person shooting feels responsive and fluid – a notable step up from what we've seen from BioWare in the past.

This is particularly evident as you begin to consider the special abilities that come into play: exotic gear that can be found out in the world and looted from corpses before being slotted into empty spaces in the suit. These powerful attacks can be combined between players in a party, setting off chain combos and prompting large-scale scenes of AOE destruction. It's encouraging to see; *Anthem* is a game that feels wholeheartedly designed around cooperative play, leveraging the best elements of the shared-world shooter model with what it knows fans are desperate to see integrated.

Anthem might not be a typical BioWare experience, but you shouldn't dismiss it. Its scope is huge, the ambition is ridiculous, and from what we've seen so far it looks like it will easily fill that huge hole in your heart that has been made by the gradual decline of *Destiny 2*.

ANTHEM is the latest project from *Mass Effect* developer BioWare. Find out more here: ea.com/games/anthem



△×□ You may notice that Leon S. Kennedy and Claire Redfield look and sound a little different to how you remember them. That's because the studio has recast the duo; not only do they both have new voice actors, but body models too, to make use of the RE Engine's photogrammetry capabilities.

ETA TBC 2019 | PUB CAPCOM | DEV IN-HOUSE

Resident Evil 2

It's a remake in name alone



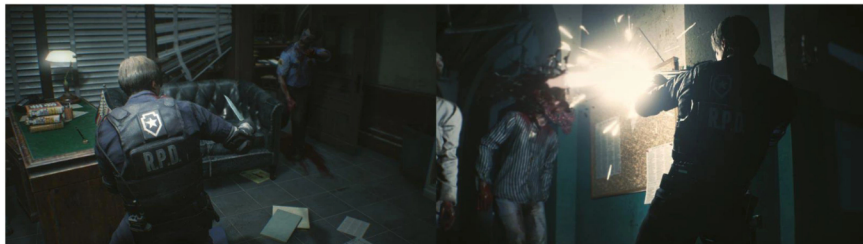
Reflecting on the past often has a habit of eliciting a mixed emotional response.

The familiar pang of nostalgia drives recollection, leaving

you at the mercy of something so utterly impossible to control that it can be difficult to know where you stand with formative memories of the past. The good times come flooding back with the bad, gradually at first, as if a gentle wave were lapping a shore, then more frantically, a hazardous retreat into what has already been written. Nostalgia is often indistinct and untameable.

And yet so often do we find ourselves at its mercy. Is it this that has helped enshrine the return of *Resident Evil 2* as a point of conflict in our hearts and minds? We're overjoyed that a legitimate classic is being presented to a new audience in an aesthetic form it will appreciate, while still disappointed that Capcom isn't channelling its budget, bandwidth and expertise into bringing about an entirely new experience. What we're trying to say is that approaching this remake with a clear head is easier said than done – though it's in your best interest to do so.

As too is retreating from the series' long and storied history – forgetting all that has transpired across the two decades of subsequent franchise mutation – in an effort to fully appreciate what Capcom is in the process of achieving here. It's important for us all to do so, mind; *Resident Evil 2* deserves to be viewed free of expectation and condemnation born

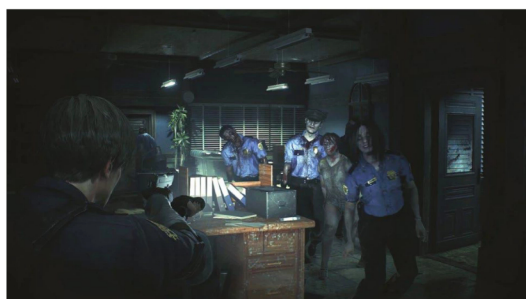


“RESIDENT EVIL 2 FEELS LIKE A LANDMARK MOMENT, A RETURN TO FORM FOR A GENRE THAT HAS LONG GRAPPLED WITH ITS PLACE IN THE MODERN ERA.”

from the past. It deserves to be viewed anew rather than as a relic of the past worth saving or celebrating.

The reason behind our thinking here is that *Resident Evil 2* feels like a landmark moment, a return to form for a genre that has long grappled with its place in the modern era. Capcom is treating *Resident Evil 2* as a brand-new release, using the 1998 classic as little more than a foundation for bigger and better things. Take the headquarters of the Raccoon City Police Department, a building cast in increasingly bleak shades of disrepair once rookie cop Leon S. Kennedy arrives on the scene – one week late to a new job only to find himself immediately swept up in a whirlpool of viscera and violence.

For many of us it's a familiar location, one with a lot of history attached to it; memories of strangled screams echoing out from behind tear-soaked sofa cushions. But seeing it presented this way, rebuilt lovingly in the ever-impressive RE Engine – Capcom's proprietary





△×□ Resident Evil 2 is being built using the proprietary RE engine, which made its debut with Resident Evil VII last January. It looks absolutely stunning, making us fear that we might not be able to stand up to the game's horrors all over again.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

▲ This isn't some lazy remake, Capcom is basically creating an all-new game

□ It looks freaking gorgeous, using the same game engine as Resident Evil VII

× Resident Evil 2 will once again feature twin campaigns, split between Leon and Claire

○ Given the scope of this project, we're excited to see what surprises await us

toolset that allowed its in-house development teams to put so much life and energy into experimental first-person horror experience *Resident Evil VII* early last year – and it's difficult to find the room to breathe.

It looks incredible, and even better in motion. The depth to the spaces, the detail found in the particle and lighting effects, the sense of presence each of the shambling zombies holds over its claustrophobic corridors is truly startling. The implementation of third-person movement and combat mechanics realigns *Resident Evil* with the leanings of perhaps its most famed entry, that of 2004's *Resident Evil 4*, while the revamped artificial intelligence of enemy AI, the implementation of full dismemberment systems – you haven't truly lived until you've severed an encroaching combatants arm at the bone with a few well-placed shots – and the ability to see the player character become visibly weary and scarred from assaults puts this on a plane of existence above any of its potential competition.

That in itself is misleading, though, as *Resident Evil 2* has no obvious competition to speak of. The only things it is fighting with is your memories of the past and the trajectory of the franchise it belongs to; as *VII* looks to thrust

the series in a new sustainable direction, this title only seeks to pull us back into the past, in an instant making us only too aware of how far the survival-horror genre could have gone had Capcom not steered towards more action-oriented experiences in the Noughts.

There is something truly haunting about *Resident Evil 2*'s presentation. The game's playable spaces are as expressive as they have ever been. They are forging a true sense of place in a world that feels somewhat rooted in reality – the retro aesthetic of the environmental and character designs feeling better realised than it ever has before. The shift in perspective, the renewed visual style and new-found affinity for guts and gore feel like a match made in survival horror heaven. There's still a part of us that wishes we were receiving a more faithful remake that echoed that of the original design – perhaps made in the style of the legendary *Resident Evil* remake – but that's just the nostalgia talking. Take a step back and you'll be able to appreciate this for what it is; one of the most impressive and visually striking games coming in 2019.

RESIDENT EVIL 2 is the latest project from the talented folks at Capcom. Find out more here: capcom.com



THE OLDEST HOUSE

Control is the most non-linear game Remedy has ever created. All of it takes place within The Oldest House, the headquarters for the Federal Bureau Of Control. It's effectively an entire world within one location, with the space adhering to surrealist logic as it shifts and contorts around you.

The world opens up the deeper in you crawl, expanding as you earn new abilities and come to understand the rituals that control the landscape.

BUILDING FROM THE PAST

Remedy has a lot of experience with action shooters. *Control* is taking the supernatural powers introduced in *Quantum Break* and is blending it with the stylish combat of *Max Payne*, and the results are certainly impressive. Given that the environments can, effectively, be procedurally ripped apart by gunfire and kinetic collisions, we're expecting some spectacular combat scenarios as you take on members of a shadow agency called the Hiss.



SUPERNATURAL POWERS

As you progress through *Control* you'll find that you eventually earn new abilities and upgrades for your Service Weapon. The abilities include paranormal powers, such as the capacity to levitate or launch objects with force at enemies, while the weapon itself can shift into different forms. We only know of two as of writing, with the gun jumping between precision (handgun configuration) and damage (shotgun) as you see fit.

ETA TBC 2019 | PUB 505 GAMES | DEV REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT

Control

Nothing is at it seems in The Oldest House



It's a new game from Remedy Entertainment. It's weird, okay. It's *super weird*. Not that we've necessarily come to expect anything less from the studio that delivered *Max Payne*, *Alan Wake* and *Quantum Break* to us over the last two decades, but *Control* honestly caught us a little off-guard.

The game is based around the idea of investigating the headquarters of a federal agency responsible for monitoring the unexplained. The world is subversive and steeped in the unnatural, presenting level and scenario design from an ever-shifting perspective. *Control* is non-linear by its very nature, meaning the only way to progress is to dig into the threads of story that you stumble across and follow them the best you can. Navigating the spaces of The Oldest House – that's the aforementioned HQ – is no easy task, particularly as the environments adhere to nought but a dreamlike logic – its twisting corridors infested by supernatural entities. It's difficult to know how Remedy will handle the construction of such a free-form experience, though we're confident that it will still deliver in all the ways that we've come to expect from the studio: an intriguing story and high-octane action based within a world with a weird streak running down its spine. Basically, an experience that no other developer in this industry would dare attempt.

CONTROL is the latest project from the talented folks at Remedy Entertainment. Find out more here: remedygames.com/control

ETA TBC 2019 | PUB TECHLAND PUBLISHING | DEV TECHLAND

Dying Light 2

Nobody said surviving would ever be easy



HUMANITY LIVES TO DESTROY

Dying Light 2 pulls the action away from the idyllic vistas of Harran and into an apocalyptic vision of the Modern Dark Ages. Here, the undead aren't the only threat you have to contend with – after years of strife, what remains of humanity is desperate to survive and rebuild itself, no matter the cost. In *Dying Light 2* we'll be forced to contend with a mutating zombie threat and warring factions seeking control over the future of humanity.



A BRAVE NEW WORLD

Techland is overhauling its acclaimed parkour movement systems and it wanted to create a landscape to better take advantage of that work. The result is a city far more vertical and diverse, giving us plenty of opportunity to quickly (and stylishly) navigate the space as we please. Honestly, as if there were any lingering doubts, Techland has overtaken DICE as the masters of the fluid open-world movement paradigm.



THE WORLD REACTS TO YOUR DECISIONS

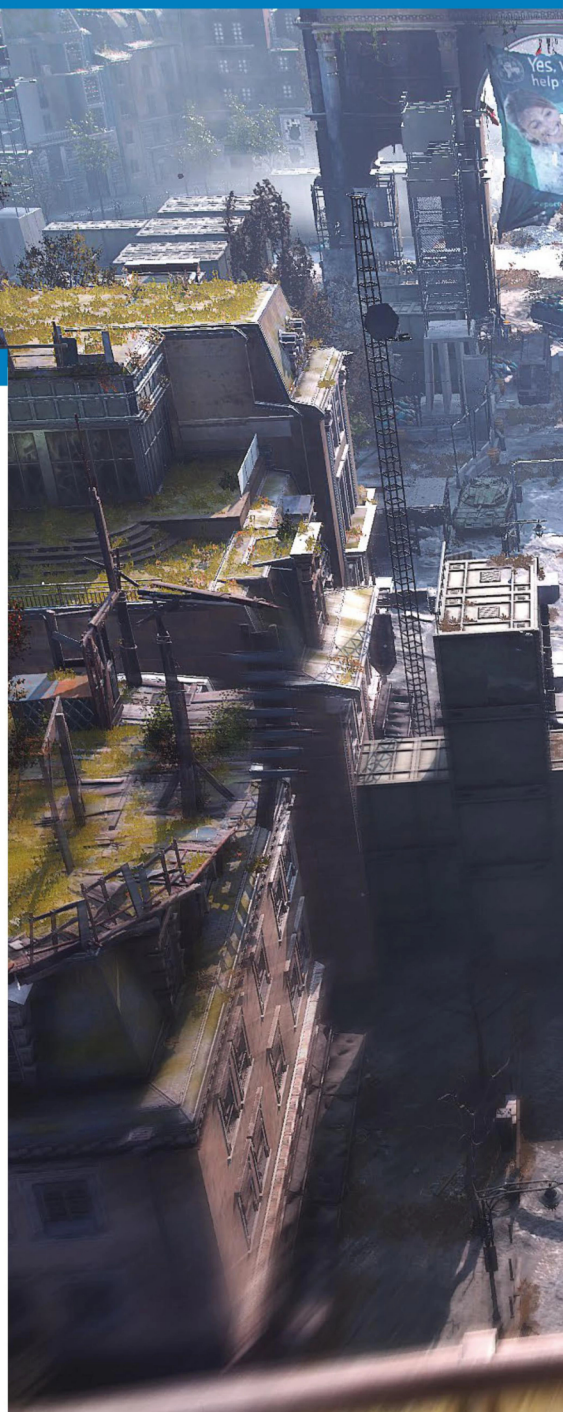
Choice and decision lie at the heart of *Dying Light 2*, with both the world design and the story reacting to your actions in clear and obvious ways. Too often studios promise this level of interactivity with the composition of a place and its populous, but fail to deliver. Techland has brought in legendary scribe Chris Avellone to help shape this twisting narrative vision and we're impressed by what we've seen thus far.



FORGE A UNIQUE PATH

Given the incredible level of interactivity that players will be given with the story and this world, it really puts us in a somewhat unique position to carve out our own path. *Dying Light 2* has returned to the playing field with a whole new host of abilities and customisable weapons, meaning that you'll be able to really dial in what sort of character you want to play in this mercurial, ever-shifting vision of the post-apocalypse.

DYING LIGHT 2 will arrive in early 2019 from the studio behind *Dead Island* and *Dying Light*, Techland. Find out more here: dyinglightgame.com







ETA 5 OCT 2018 | PUB UBISOFT | DEV UBISOFT QUEBEC

Assassin's Creed Odyssey

Ten details you need to know about Ubisoft Quebec's unexpected adventure

ASSASSIN'S CREED ODYSSEY is the latest from the talented folks at Ubisoft Quebec. Find out more here: assassinscreed.ubisoft.com



IT'S SET IN GREECE

1 *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* is set in 431 BC, which, if you aren't a history buff, means that we are landing squarely in ancient Greece territory. Now that's long before the order of assassins was even established, which means that, yes, somewhat confusingly *Odyssey* will indeed be a prequel to last year's *Assassin's Creed Origins*. Don't worry about the continuity, just roll with it.

CHOOSE YOUR ASSASSIN

2 For the first time in *Assassin's Creed* history, Ubisoft is giving us the opportunity to decide who we want to play through the entirety of the game as. You'll be able to choose between *Kassandra* and *Alexios*; the system is similar to that of *Mass Effect*, giving you the freedom to play the assassin that you feel more comfortable hanging out with for 30-plus hours.

SUBTLE SHIFT IN PLAY

3 While *Kassandra* and *Alexios* will walk through the same story and play exactly the same, Ubisoft has promised that certain characters you meet along the way will interact with each assassin in subtly different ways. Basically, this is all about celebrating consumer choice and, like any good RPG, about giving you a stronger connection with the lead character.

IT'S A FULL RPG

4 While *Origins* may have introduced a variety of RPG elements to the *Assassin's Creed* series, *Odyssey* is leaning into this more heavily. Not only has combat been further refined, relying on skill more so than ever before, but you'll also have the opportunity to shape the story and character as branching-dialogue trees, romance options and a suite of new abilities are all introduced into play.

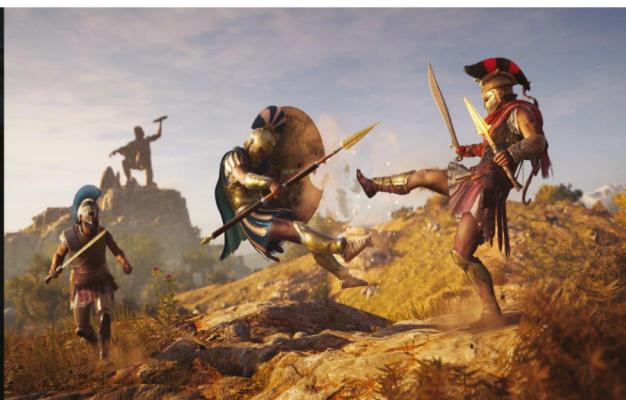
THIS IS A GREEK TRAGEDY

5 Set some 400 years before *Origins*, Ubisoft Quebec wanted something suitably epic, turning Greece into an open-world playground. Regardless of whether you pick *Kassandra* or *Alexios*, you'll be the descendant of the mighty *Leonidas* who gets cast out of the Spartan order after defying a prophecy of the Delphi oracle. The story picks up 17 years after you get kicked out of the army.



WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It's coming from the dev team responsible for Assassin's Creed Syndicate
- For the first time in an AC game you'll be able to choose who you play as
- Naval combat returns and, yes, it does look pretty damned awesome
- This is effectively a sprawling RPG, building on the combat from *Origins*



PICK YOUR SIDE IN CONFLICT

6 As a mercenary, you'll often find yourself caught up in a larger conflict outside the usual slew of side quests and busywork. *Odyssey* is set around the Peloponnesian War, a bloody battle that raged between the Athenians and the Spartans. We've been told that you'll be able to choose a side in this conflict, helping either of the armies to regain territory and take control of Greece.

THE CONFLICT IS HUGE

7 We've never seen battles of this scale in Assassin's Creed before, and it looks damned impressive. These are best demonstrated in the Conquest Battles, huge fights between the two armies that will see you attempting to cut through a screen full of enemies, all while multiple boss-strength NPCs roam the battleground looking to cut you down. Incredible to see in action.

NAVAL COMBAT RETURNS

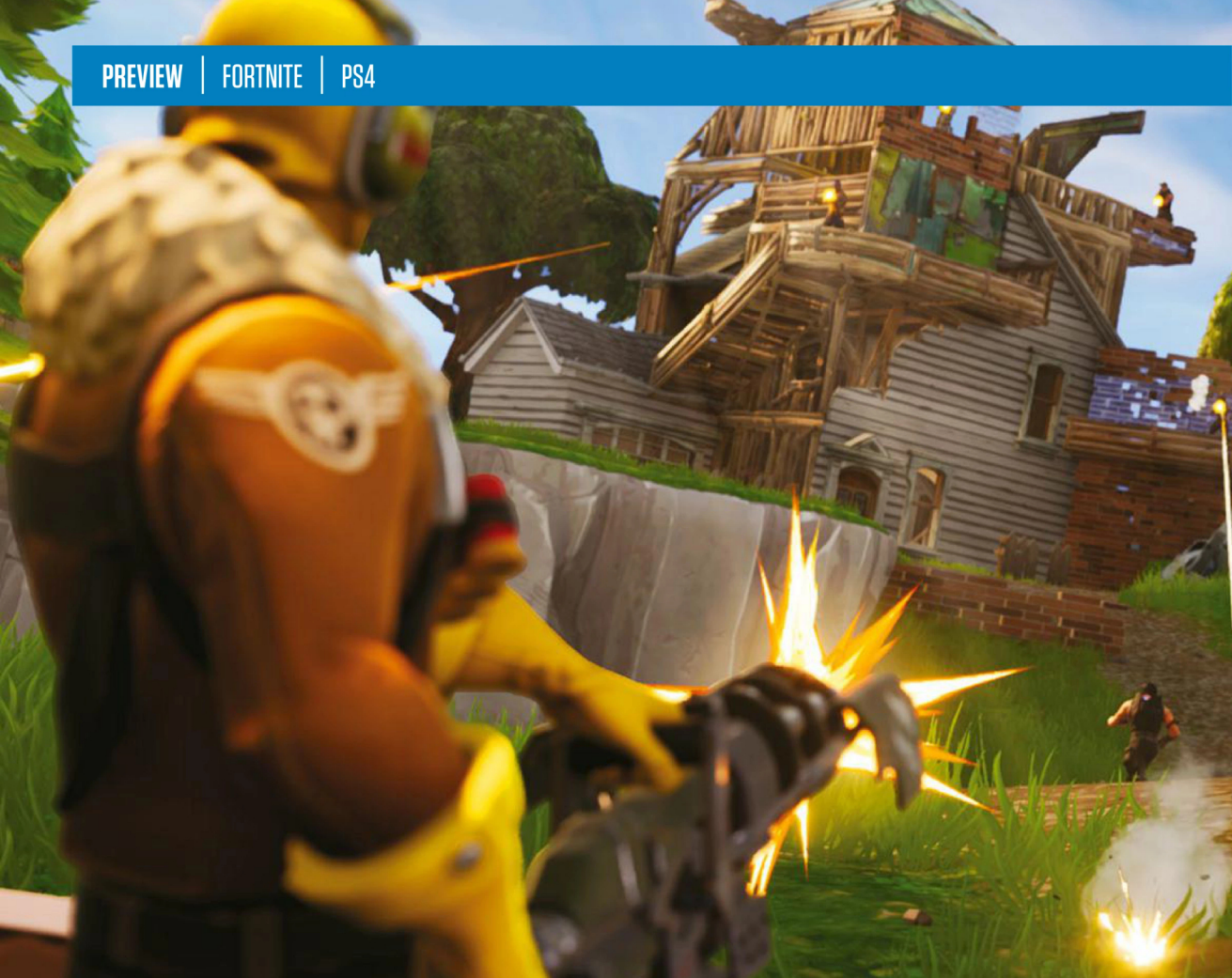
8 Ship-to-ship combat is returning in a big way in *Odyssey*. You'll have your own vessel to control and customise – changing aesthetical components, recruiting new crew members and upgrading the ship's combat capabilities throughout the game. While the vessels handle similarly to those seen in *Black Flag* and *Rogue*, they have received a noted tune-up under the hood.

PRESENT DAY REMAINS

9 The studio isn't, unsurprisingly, saying all that much about the most divisive portion of the Assassin's Creed formula – that of the present-day sections of play. We do know that Layla Hassan will be making a return, continuing her story on from where *Origins* left off, likely picking straight up with her journey to Alexandria with William Miles.

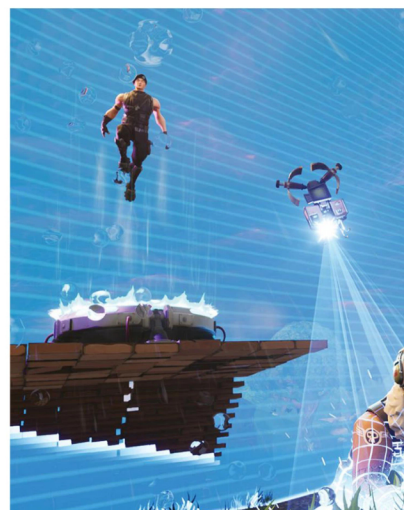
ASSASSIN'S CREED ISN'T ANNUAL

10 Don't worry, Assassin's Creed isn't returning to its annualised release schedule. Yes, we know that *Origins* only released last October, but there's good reason for this game arriving so soon after. The Quebec studio went into full production on *Odyssey* after it wrapped on 2015's *Syndicate*, meaning this has already been in development for close to three years.



WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- △ This is literally the biggest game in the world. It must be doing something right
- The latest season introduced a slew of new weapons and items
- ✕ Playground mode recently re-launched and it's proving to be a whole lot of fun
- We can't get enough of Fortnite's weird story. More please, Epic!



ETA EARLY ACCESS | PUB EPIC GAMES | DEV IN-HOUSE

Fortnite

Epic has forged one of the most interesting and arresting narratives we've seen in the industry in years, so let's talk about why that is



The battle royale has proven itself to be one of the strongest vehicles for emergent storytelling that this industry

has ever seen. Even in its relative infancy, the genre found immediate success in letting players forge and share their own stories in the face of shifting combat parameters; feats of heroism and tales laced with tragedy cast out across a canvas that gladly resets itself between rounds. It's these emergent moments that have helped keep the likes of *Fortnite: Battle Royale* and *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* within the sphere of public interest for so long. But developer Epic Games knew that the battle royale bubble could burst at any time; that the games within it could only stay relevant if players felt as if they were invested in more than mere action alone. The players had to invest in the game beyond a desire to win or unlock new items through a laundry list of challenges.

Fortnite has shifted to meet this challenge head on. It has made players care about a story outside of their own actions; quietly investing them in the intersection between a shifting narrative and the evolution of the core gameplay. What's truly intriguing to see is how Epic has continued to iterate and build upon this idea of over the past eight months. *Battle Royale* now features one of the most ingenious game narratives that we have seen executed in years, leveraging the game's lack of traditional arc, named characters or entrenched lore to tell an ever-evolving story that casts the map as the central character in a story that feels as wildly unpredictable as it does transformative.

As any consumer of MMO worlds will attest to, live-service storytelling is certainly nothing new in this industry. The wave of shared-world shooters that arrived at the turn of the generation have too been toying with this concept, delivering mixed results, while BioWare has practically enshrined it as a tentpole for quest and mission design in 2019's *Anthem*. So why celebrate *Fortnite* for something that the industry has been experimenting with for over a decade, let alone something that is at the forefront of the thinking of some of the biggest triple-A studios in the world?

Perhaps it's because we're seeing live-service storytelling implemented in a game that resets itself every 20 minutes. That in and of itself feels fresh and exciting. Epic has crafted a narrative through little more than subtle environmental storytelling, contextual hints and in-game markers, and it has done so without diluting or distracting from the core

allure of the game – it's still fundamentally focused around the idea of leaving 100 players on a deserted island to shoot, loot and build their way to hard-earned victory. The core balance of play remains uncontested, and Epic has simply constructed something around all of this that the players can become invested in should they so desire to.

Fortnite is finding so much success because it has been able to take something as rudimentary as a map update and turn it into a huge world event. The map is persistent, even if your progress through it isn't. It can now change instantaneously for tens of millions of players around the world – creating 'blink or you'll miss it' moments that light up the Internet and keep millions glued to the screen for every tease and every development as it emerges slowly over a season of content.

The result is a game that feels richer and deeper than any of its competitors, if not any other live-service game currently on the market. In pushing a constantly updating narrative alongside a robust and expressive avatar upgrade system – not to mention a monetisation system that offers little more than cosmetic updates – Epic has created an environment that feels welcoming to players new and old, the game balance as strong as it was the day *Battle Royale* launched, but the world far more expressive than we could ever have imagined it would be.

Where *Destiny* and its kin has struggled to pin its plots around barely visible alien threats, while *World Of Warcraft* trudges ahead under the weight of its 14-year old plot, and while *Overwatch* continues to build out back story while failing to pull focus onto its present-day timeline, *Fortnite* has gleefully made the map the centre of its story and had one hell of a lot of fun with it. Between the comets threatening to wipe out areas of the maps, the sky ripping itself apart at the seams and items mysteriously vanishing out of the game world only to reappear in our own, this is storytelling that celebrates the chaos and ingenuity of videogames in a way we've seen only teased by other developers in the past.

We have no idea where Epic will take *Battle Royale* next, and that's what makes it so damned exciting. We have a feeling that whatever should happen in the next season of content, it will be yet another glimpse into the future of narrative design, world building and storytelling in the games industry.

BATTLE ROYALE is technically still in Early Access. The official release date will eventually be revealed here: epicgames.com/fortnite



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Editor's
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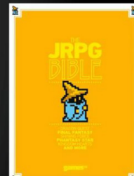
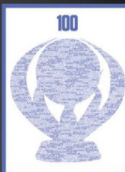
Worst Ways To Die In Videogaming



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WORLDS COLLIDE

WE SIT DOWN WITH INSOMNIAC GAMES TO DISCUSS **SPIDER-MAN**, THE LARGEST AND MOST AMBITIOUS GAME THE STUDIO HAS DARED TAKE ON IN ITS 24-YEAR HISTORY

“Listen, I get it. I know that 99.9 per cent of people are only buying this game because they want to swing around as Spider-Man – and trust me, you’re going to be doing a ton of that in this game – but I think that when you look back at the great comic book stories, when you look at the best Marvel movies, what they all do so well is that they tell a human story. You get to experience the person behind the mask as much as the person wearing it,” considers creative director Bryan Intihar, speaking exclusively to *PLAY*. “To really capture a true Spider-Man experience I feel like you couldn’t just play as Spider-Man.”

Few videogame studios have understood the core of this character better than Insomniac. It knows that Spider-Man is only as legendary as the challenges

that Peter Parker encounters, regardless of whether he is facing them inside of the suit or out of it. That has been established time and time again over the last 56 years; there have been countless interpretations of the character in that time across every entertainment medium you could think of – be it comic books, film, TV, animation, videogames and beyond.

Spider-Man’s enduring success has established a loyal fanbase, one broad enough to ensure that every fan will likely carry a different perspective on what elements make Spider-Man such an iconic and long-lasting figure. All of that can create seismic, intractable expectations for a creative team – particularly one charged with overseeing a project as immediately impressive and anticipated as this upcoming PS4 exclusive.

Insomniac might have been creating videogames for close to 25 years, but the studio knows it has never faced anything quite like this before. *Spider-Man* is a creative challenge the studio isn’t taking lightly, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that has the whole world watching. “There’s an unbelievable amount of responsibility for us to get this right,” admits Intihar, the tone of his voice suggesting that this isn’t the first time he has had to

consider the weight that has fallen onto his shoulders. "Spider-Man is easily one of the most popular characters in pop culture. The character is so important to so many people that they just want it to be everything that they have in their head. That is super exciting and, at the same time, it's also unbelievably scary."

"But," he maintains, "I think having that excitement and fear is what has kept us on our toes throughout this whole development process. We are going to make the best game that we possibly can."

MAN BEHIND THE MASK

It all begins with the man behind the mask. That's where the best Spider-Man stories have always been born, as Peter Parker's two worlds collide – the conflict seeping out of every facet of his life, the inevitable fallout affecting the loved ones that continue to support and surround him.

Insomniac is setting its sights on a similar set-up and it's doing so in a spectacular fashion, crafting a relatable story within the biggest open world it has ever created alongside responsive web-swinging that surpasses anything we've seen in a videogame and incredible acrobatic combat that captures the playfulness and improvisational nature of the character. The world design, the movement, the combat and the fun way that progression is being handled are, of course, points of interest in isolation (and trust us, we'll get to each of them in time) though it's the wider experience that has really gotten our senses tingling. We've been waiting a lifetime for a Spider-Man game that approaches the character with this much authority and reverence.

It's as Intihar insists: "To deliver a true Spider-Man experience you have to see Peter Parker's life, you have to really deliver on the human element to the story. One of the reasons that the character is so beloved is that he has a vulnerability and relatability to him. When Peter succeeds, Spider-Man fails." And that, as Intihar knows

only too well as a life-long fan of The Amazing Spider-Man, goes both ways. Peter might spend a hell of a lot of his time battling villains in a spectacular fashion, but his problems are often rooted in far more familiar areas. That's an element to Spider-Man's set-up that Insomniac is eager to explore. "In a lot of great Marvel stories there's almost of great Marvel nature to them. There is this soap opera nature to the superhero action, drama outside of the superhero action, right? I feel like Peter, of all of Marvel's characters, personifies that really well. We wanted to have that back and forth, for you to see and experience both sides [to the character]," says Intihar, adding, "that's the ultimate goal, to explore how those two worlds collide."

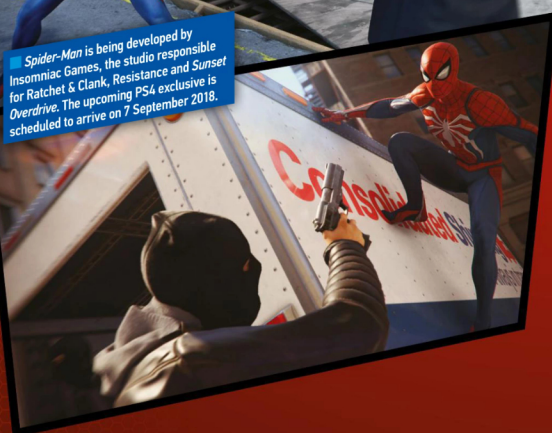
This is one reason – of many, admittedly – that we find ourselves drawn to Insomniac's take on Spider-Man far more than we were to any of Activision's attempts in the last decade. Insomniac understands that there is more to making a successful Spider-Man game than mere mechanical design or fan-baiting alone. There's comedy, heart and drama to the best stories and the best representations of the character; the reason Peter Parker has persisted over time and maintained his place in the pantheon of popular culture is because we can see and every one of him reflected in each and every one of us. More than that though, he represents – the best version of what we could be – it's liberating to see that reflected in a videogame so forthrightly, seeping out of the story and into the core play itself.

The dichotomy between great power and great responsibility has been leveraged to tell countless stories over the years, used as a vessel to explore what happens when an ordinary kid

Insomniac has crafted an incredible open world to contain this adventure. It's four-times larger than Sunset City, packed with challenges, missions and dynamic encounters. Fans of the wider Marvel universe will also want to keep an eye out for famous landmarks, such as the Sanctum Sanctorum.

"WHILE I WANT TO FEEL SUPER RIGHT AWAY, I STILL WANT TO FEEL EVEN MORE SUPER OVER TIME"

Spider-Man is being developed by Insomniac Games, the studio responsible for Ratchet & Clank, Resistance and Sunset Overdrive. The upcoming PS4 exclusive is scheduled to arrive on 7 September 2018.





with a good heart stumbles across extraordinary powers. The fact that Insomniac dares to deliver a project such as this, while still improving on the core facets and tenets of every Spider-Man game that has preceded it, warrants excitement alone.

Of course the studio, eager to avoid spoilers, still refuses to detail core aspects to Parker's life behind the mask. We know that he works in a lab, but Insomniac has constantly stopped short of confirming the name of the company he is employed by. We know that the 23-year old is eight years into his career as the friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man, but we don't yet know what he has lost along the way. We know that Mary Jane Watson will play a big role in the game (a playable character and journalist for *The Daily Bugle*), but the full state of their 'it's complicated' relationship has yet to be laid bare. We know that Peter's presence will be felt in the game through cinematics and interactions with the likes of Aunt May and Miles Morales, though

whether he will be playable in critical components of the main story remains a mystery.

We aren't all that surprised by the secrecy. The story of this Spider-Man game has been kept largely under wraps; Insomniac's lead writer Jon Paquette and long-time Marvel scribe Christos Gage have co-written a monster amount of material – reportedly the equivalent of a 3,000-page novel – alongside the studio's own Ben Arfmann and legendary Spider-Man writer Dan Slott, who have also contributed.

This is all in service of creating a Spider-Man story that stays true to the legacy while still being given the space to evolve over the course of the game and, integrally, comfortably exist in his own pocket of the Marvel universe. Insomniac's Spider-Man is separate from the 616 and from any of the other versions you may have seen of the character over the years. The successful collaboration between Marvel Games and Insomniac has ensured that this version of Peter – donning a suit with a white spider splashed across the



Combat has always been a bit lousy in Spider-Man games – we're looking at you *Shattered Dimensions*, and every game before. Thankfully, Insomniac has taken a different approach, ensuring that fighting always feels acrobatic, natural and expressive.

torso – has room to evolve throughout the course of the game, while remaining familiar enough that he can duck into crossover events in the realms of the comics if he is needed.

"We want to stay true to the character, but we also want to mix things up a bit – the white suit is a good example of that. You look at that character, you look at that suit and you just know that it is Spider-Man... but there's a little something different about it – something that says that *this* is the Insomniac Spider-Man, that he's a little more unique to us," says Intihar, not that he will dare get into spoiler territory as to where it comes from.

"With Marvel there's a reason for everything, and we want to make sure that there is a cool story attached to [the suit]. We wanted to make sure that there was something that identified it as *our* Spider-Man and, trust me, there's an interesting story reason surrounding how it came to be."

MOVEMENT AS AN EXPRESSION

"Swinging was the number one thing we knew we had to get right. It was *literally* the first thing that we worked on," says Intihar, teasing that he has a "very ugly looking video of Spider-Man swinging around a grey box world" buried somewhere on his computer. That's the original prototype that the studio put together three years ago, an important milestone for the studio as it worked "

BUILDING A BETTER SPIDER-MAN

INSOMNIAC DETAILS PROGRESSION AND CRAFTING

Progression has been a closely guarded secret over the last 12 months, though we were steadfast in our resolve to get some details out of Spider-Man creative director Bryan Intihar, no matter how difficult it might prove to be... "There's actually two different types of progression and I'd love to go over both!" Oh, that was easy.

"As you play the main story, and some of the optional quests, you're going to be gaining experience points. Eventually you'll reach your threshold like you would in another game, and you level up, earning a skill point, and that can be spent on basically one of three areas," he explains, noting that those three areas are effectively based around the core of the character and experience. You can invest in improving traversal, increasing your capabilities in combat or in a third category that he describes as a "mixed bag between stealth and all of the other things".

That's only "one half of the production pie" though. As Intihar tells us, spending time out in the open world completing activities is how you begin to improve your suit and gadgets. "It's stopping dynamic crimes, it's the Taskmaster challenges, it's clearing out the Kingpin bases... it's a bunch of other things I'm probably not allowed to talk about yet; completing all of these things gives you a type of token."

These various tokens will allow you the opportunity to make different modifications to your suit, such as reducing melee or firearm damage. They can be used to craft all-new suits to wear out in the open world and, should you collect enough tokens and XP, used to help you switch out the special abilities that are inherent to each custom suit to mix and match the power and design as you see fit. The tokens can also be used to upgrade and earn new gadgets, which can later be incorporated into combat and traversal. "Basically," he says, "think about it like this: XP gives you skill points and open world activities give you different tokens that you can use for crafting."

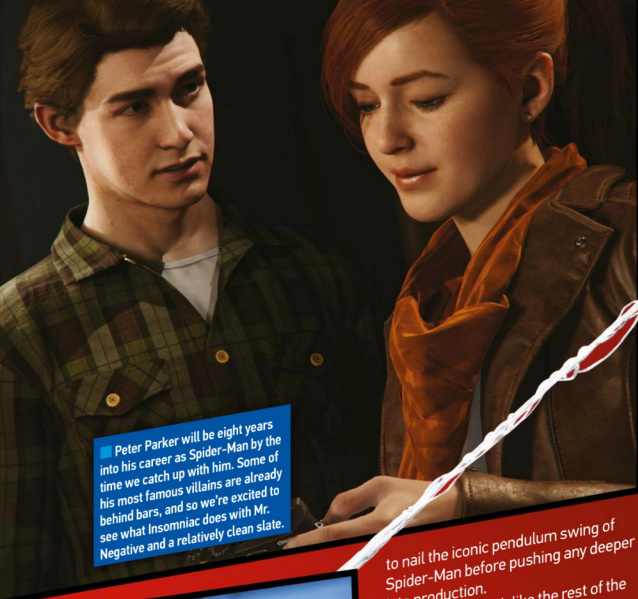
AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, COMPLETING MISSIONS AND FOILING CRIMES IN THE GAME EARNS YOU TOKENS TOWARDS CUSTOMISATIONS AND UPGRADES TO YOUR SUIT. EACH SUIT TYPE GIVES YOU A DIFFERENT ABILITY. THE ADVANCED SUIT HAS A SPECIAL SPINNING WEB ATTACK, FOR INSTANCE, BUT ONCE THE SUIT IS UNLOCKED ITS ABILITY CAN BE MAPPED TO ANY OTHER STYLE YOU HAVE UNLOCKED.

MUCH LIKE SPIDER-MAN'S APPEARANCE IN THE MCU, THIS SUIT FEATURES ARTICULATED LENSES ON THE MASK. IN THE MOVIES THIS WAS TO CONTROL INPUT TO PARKER'S EMBELLISHED SENSES, AND WE IMAGINE MUCH THE SAME IS TRUE HERE. IT ALSO JUST GIVES HIM A MUCH MORE EXPRESSIVE APPEARANCE WITH THE MASK ON.

FROM FOOTAGE WE'VE SEEN, THE TRADITIONAL SMALL BLACK LOGO SPIDER-MAN COSTUME WILL NOT ONLY FEATURE IN THE GAME, BUT WILL LIKELY BE WHAT YOU WEAR WHEN YOU START AND TAKE ON WILSON FISK. IT WILL PROBABLY TAKE A BIT OF A BRUISING THOUGH, HENCE THE NEED FOR THIS UPGRADE.

INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO FIND SOME OF PARKER'S OLD GEAR AS COLLECTIBLES HIDDEN AROUND THE CITY. OLD BACKPACKS ARE HIDDEN AROUND NEW YORK AND OFFER SOME BACKSTORY TO PETER'S JOURNEY UP TO THIS POINT, INCLUDING SOME OF HIS OLD TECH.

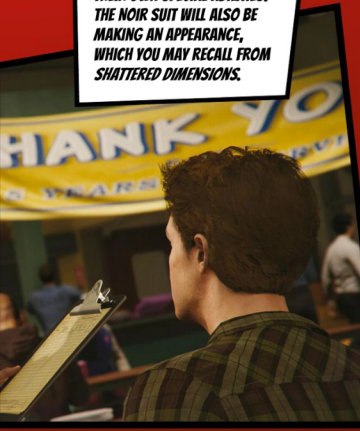
The events of the story will take place over just a handful of weeks in Autumn, meaning that much the cycle between day and night will be shifted depending on the needs of the main missions. Once you've completed the game you'll be able to adjust the time as you see fit.



Peter Parker will be eight years into his career as Spider-Man by the time we catch up with him. Some of his most famous villains are already behind bars, and so we're excited to see what Insomniac does with Mr. Negative and a relatively clean slate.



ALONG WITH THE TRADITIONAL SUIT AND ADVANCED SUIT WE ALSO KNOW THAT THE SPIDER-PUNK, VELOCITY AND INFINITY WAR IRON SPIDER SUITS WILL BE AVAILABLE AS PRE-ORDER BONUSES, EACH WITH THEIR OWN SPECIAL ABILITIES. THE NOIR SUIT WILL ALSO BE MAKING AN APPEARANCE, WHICH YOU MAY RECALL FROM SHATTERED DIMENSIONS.



to nail the iconic pendulum swing of Spider-Man before pushing any deeper into production.

Intihar – much like the rest of the staff at Insomniac – is keenly aware of how important the aesthetic of that pendulum swing is to selling *Spider-Man* to fans that would have otherwise been to the fence. The character is, after all, Marvel's most acrobatic, expressive and performative superhero; the city is his stage and the city is always watching. Insomniac knew that locking this aspect of the game down was effectively more important than anything else it could achieve for a lot of perspective players. That is largely due to the shadow cast by just a handful of decades-old videogames. "I'm not gonna lie to you and say we don't realise that there's been a lot of other Spider-Man games," Intihar says, laughing. "Just go to my Twitter feed and you'll find that fans send me clips of what all of the other games have done every single day."

He laughs, but we get the sense that the overbearing presence of what has come before has kept Insomniac on track. Fans are desperate for a game to truly capture the freedom and manoeuvrability of web-swinging – a manoeuvrability that accentuates the creativity and freedom inherent to the character – in a way that lives up to the memory of in a way that celebrates *Spider-Man* from 2000 and Treyarch's seminal 2004 effort, *Spider-Man 2*. Overcoming nostalgia is a herculean task, and that's why Insomniac pumped so many years and resources – leveraging its experience with the likes of Ratchet & Clank and *Sunset Overdrive* – into ensuring that it has created traversal systems that will allow you to navigate open-world spaces in a way that you've never before experienced.

"We obviously looked at all of those [past] games; we would be foolish as developers to not see what other games have done, but at the end of the

day we wanted Spider-Man to feel like an Insomniac game. I feel like that's why Sony and Marvel came to us... they wanted us to create a Spider-Man experience [that] also has the DNA of *Insomniac*," he says, before giving us further insight into the approach of the studio here. "It wasn't about us saying, 'Well, we're just gonna recreate *Spider-Man 2*'. It was more, 'how do we take elements that people love from those games, the feeling that those games gave people, and build upon our experience with games like *Sunset Overdrive* to kind of meld those roles together?'"

Insomniac's plan, as Intihar tells it, was to ensure that you felt like Spider-Man right off the bat. We are, after all, being put in control of an experienced superhero rather than the high-school hero so often portrayed in media and superhero comic book stories. This is a Spider-Man eight years into his career; as the game opens we see Spidey at his peak, in the process of putting his greatest foe to date – Wilson "The Kingpin" Fisk – behind bars on The Raft along with the likes of Electro, Rhino, Scorpion and Vulture. For the game to immediately reflect Peter's experience as Spider-Man, his movement through the city had to be an expression of his ever-increasing confidence.

Finding that balance hasn't been easy. "That was a big factor for us, because we wanted you to feel like a superhero right away," Intihar tells us. "Listen, I can't swing in real life and I can't cling to the walls. I don't want it to be so hard in the game that I can't fulfil the fantasy of being Spider-Man. That being said, it's got to have a long enough tail that there is a level of skill and mastery to it... while I want to feel super right away, I still want to feel even more super over time."

You see this reflected in the micro and the macro of the way Spider-Man traverses New York City, an open-world concrete jungle gym that Insomniac teases is four-times the size of *Sunset Overdrive*'s Sunset City. To hit the basics once again, yes, your momentum and positioning does affect the trajectory of Spider-Man's movement and, yes, the webs do stick to walls. Sold.

The basics see Parker using skill proficiencies such as the web-zip – which sees Spidey throwing out two webs to pull himself forward or make

sharp turns in the air – and his enhanced agility – which lets the web-head run along walls and leap gracefully over and through obstacles – to navigate the city with ease. But as you progress through the game, as you unlock new suit abilities and upgrade elements such as your web shooters, you will soon find new and improved ways to traverse the environment. Insomniac wants movement to be an expression of the player, and the further you progress through the game – the more comfortable you begin to feel with the various controls and systems – the more satisfying the fast and fluid movement systems will become in your hands.

There is a fast-travel system in the game, but Insomniac has built its traversal in such a way that you should never feel that need to use it. That's the dream, anyway. This, all of this, is effectively an extension of the work the studio has already done with *Sunset Overdrive*. "You know, a lot of words we use to describe traversal are flow and fluidity. The same was true with what we did on *Sunset*. It was about creating a sense of momentum, a sense of flow, a sense of fluidity and a sense of, 'Oh, I hit a wall... okay, I'm just gonna run right up it and then I'm gonna leap over it!'" says Intihar, who notes that a similar mentality has been brought over to this project, with the studio working hard to make sure that Spider-Man never slows down or stops at an obstruction unless you want him to.

"That was a really hard thing for us to solve... but it should never feel like a chore to swing. When it comes to traversal – kind of like how it was when you were running the rails of *Sunset* – we're really about having a sense of expression in the way Spider-Man moves, that there's no obstacle too big."

PUNCHING ABOVE HIS WEIGHT

Plenty of energy has been expended discussing Insomniac's approach to building its very own pocket of the Marvel U to play in and of the work that has gone into streamlining the game's movement systems since the reveal of *Spider-Man* in 2017. Though if there is any one area where there remains a question mark, as with all games baring the Spider-Man branding over the years, it is in regards to the combat. A mere street brawler Spidey is not; for a game to accurately reflect that is, clearly, easier said than done. For Intihar the goal was simple enough: "It was about getting his butt off the ground, getting him in the air and really leveraging the acrobatic nature of the character."

We aren't going to argue with that assessment. The execution of that concept, on the other hand, has been 11

something of a challenge. You see, *Insomniac* is known for developing kinetic shooters with expressive weapon design, and that's across both first- and third-person proficiencies. For the team to build a satisfying brawler – one that would leverage the power set and core strengths of the character – it had to go back to basics, building out entirely new systems and mechanics while devoting large swaths of time to iteration and refinement. “While we had *Feral Rites* [an adventure-brawler, released in 2016 for *Oculus Rift*] in development around the same time as *Spider-Man*, we didn't have a ton of experience making a third-person brawler – where you're using melee and other devices in combat.”

“You look at *Ratchet*, you look at *Resistance* and you look at *Overdrive*... we're a big shooter [company] and we're really well known for our creative weapons. It definitely was a little bit of a learning curve,” Intihar admits, revealing that it took an honest assessment of what Peter can and can't do in the space it was building to set the team on the right path forward. “We asked ourselves really early on, ‘well, what can Spider-Man do that others can't?’ and then the word improvisation started to come up a lot.”

Looking at a close to final build now, the results should speak for themselves. Combat is fast and frenetic, expressive and fluid – everything that you'd expect to see from an experienced Spider-Man running around the rooftops of New York City.

The animation of Spider-Man is particularly impressive. Peter moves with the balletic grace that you'd expect to see from the character, an element of the game's design that Intihar reveals is a smooth blend of hand-animation and motion capture. “You know, it's hard to get someone to actually swing kick in the real life,” he laughs, continuing. “But the benefits of living in LA is that we have a lot of great stunt people who've done many super hero things, and it's amazing to see what they can do when they're just flipping around. So it's actually a combination of both.”

To really nail the feel *Insomniac* continued to hone in, working to strike a careful balance between Peter's keen intellect (introducing an array of abilities and gadgets into combat) and his proficiency over the web shooters (which are mechanical in design, in case you were wondering). “We went heavy on web usage. Whether it's the quick, rapid-fire webs or looking for things in the environment that you can grab and pull,” he says, noting that *Insomniac* was keen to give players the freedom

to use webs in the middle of combat or to help assist in moving stealthily through levels, should you choose to do so. This is a Spider-Man experience where you have the opportunity to shape the evolution of the character, and that will manifest itself in combat as you begin to become more comfortable with the combat systems and add new abilities to your arsenal. “When the gadgets [and] suit powers really started to get implemented – when we got him up in the air – that's when it really felt like a Spider-Man experience met an *Insomniac* game to me.”

Looking at all of this together in action, you begin to see a side to Peter Parker that we've never quite seen replicated on film before. This is the Spider-Man that you remember from the panels; combat isn't built around extensive combos, instead it's about managing groups of enemies in a highly improvisational and acrobatic fashion. It's about crowd control and using the environment to your advantage, of getting up into aerial spaces and quickly dispatching foes in any way that you see fit. Batman Arkham this is not, although we understand why you might want to use that as a point of reference.

Intihar likes to tell this story – a reoccurring incident, tracking the Arkham trilogy over the years – from his days as a community manager on *Fuse* and *Resistance 2* to producer of *Sunset* that we'd like to share with you: “It's funny but – and I remember this like it was yesterday – I can literally remember driving to lunch with my co-workers around the time that Rocksteady's Batman games were coming out and I would always say, ‘Man, we need the Marvel version of Arkham,’ Intihar recalls with a chuckle. “And now, just a few years later, to be given the opportunity to work on that – to work on *Spider-Man* – is spectacular.”

When you hear a story such as this and then glance at *Spider-Man*, perhaps you can see the connective tissue – Marvel's very own version of the Arkham games. But the reality is that *Spider-Man* has far more going for it. Its combat in particular is far more dynamic and expressive than it may at first seem.

The way that gadgets are implemented into combat is seamless; our favourite thus far is the Tripwire – a device that connects to enemies or the environment and, when triggered, fires out a web line that reels an enemy back in. Holding down the punch button launches enemies into the air, and from there you can either hit them with a barrage of hits or use webs to push and pull them in different directions and into the path of incoming enemies.

Environmental hazards can be brought into play, with Spidey able to whip items such as barrels and car doors at aggressors or even bring items in the environment crashing down on unsuspecting foes. You can use web shots to keep enemies in place and utilise web-zip to quickly close gaps – the same mechanics that you use to navigate the city so easily creating a new dynamic in combat that only improves the longer that you spend with it. “The combat team worked their butts off to get this right,” admits Intihar. “It was extremely hard; it was, in terms of overall development, definitely one of our greatest challenges.”

Another element that the team had to consider – something almost every other developer of open-world action games never need even worry about – was the core principles of Spider-Man and how that ties into his actions. Batman might bludgeon people half to death, but Peter knows that with great power comes great responsibility; that's something *Insomniac* had to tie into its combat and progression systems.

“We've made a lot of games where you shoot people, right? And a lot of them have monsters; it's either cute ones from *Ratchet* or scary ones from *Resistance*, or somewhere in between for *Sunset*, right?”, says Intihar, noting an intrinsic difference between Spider-Man and the heroes of its other titles, there can be no incidental deaths and the studio has attempted to account for that. “It's funny, I remember back at E3 2017 when we showed the guy getting kicked off the ledge. We pulled him back to safety and we slammed him down to ground, and I didn't realise how much that was going to be a hot-button topic that we didn't kill the guy.”

“Spider-Man doesn't kill people, and so I think [dealing] with that was definitely a challenge. I think it affects some mission design and combat design. We have a thing where basically if you kick an enemy off a ledge, and you don't have that time to grab him, Pete shoots out a little web, almost like a mini trip wire, that sticks to the guy, and”

■ The studio has done a truly fantastic job with the way in which you will traverse the city. Web-swinging has never looked this fast or fluid, and we can't wait to waste away hours exploring NYC from the rooftops.

■ DLC is coming for *Spider-Man*, and the first will focus on one of Spider-Man's best friend/foes. That's right, ‘The City That Never Sleeps’ will hinge around Black Cat. She's expected to make an appearance in the main game, but we're excited none the less.



**"THIS IS BY FAR THE BIGGEST
OPEN-WORLD GAME THAT WE
HAVE EVER MADE. IT'S SEVERAL
SEVERAL TIMES LARGER THAN
THE WORLD WE CREATED FOR
SUNSET OVERDRIVE"**

THE ROGUES' GALLERY

MISTER NEGATIVE

FIRST APPEARANCE: Free Comic Book Day May 2007 (*Spider-Man*)

The Spider-Man universe's very own Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Martin Li is a charitable businessman by day and a psychotic super-powered gang leader... well, also by day. His manifestation as his criminal alter ego isn't a day-and-night thing.

ELECTRO

FIRST APPEARANCE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #9

Max Dillon gained his powers in the comics after being struck by lightning while working on a power line. This particular incarnation of Dillon is based on a redesign of the character from 2009, with facial scarring now taking the place of his distinctive mask.

WILSON FISK

FIRST APPEARANCE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #50

Taking down the famous Kingpin looks to be how the action of *Spider-Man* will kick off. In the comics, Fisk's criminal underworld was a constant thorn in Spidey's side as well as the other heroes of New York (Daredevil most famously).

VULTURE

FIRST APPEARANCE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #2

Another all-time classic villain, Adrian Toomes was most recently portrayed in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, but has a more traditional look in this game. He's an engineer who built a flight harness himself, falling into crime in his pursuit of revenge against a former partner.

RHINO

FIRST APPEARANCE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #41

A former Russian enforcer, Aleksei Sytsevich has more than a thing or two in common with The Hulk in some regards, having been experimented on with chemical and radiation therapies to turn him into a super-strong behemoth. He's a true test of Spidey's might.

SCORPION

FIRST APPEARANCE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #19

Mac Gargan is a classic Spider-Man baddie and also has some connection to J. Jonah Jameson in his origin. This one-time private investigator was experimented on and lost his mind, often seeking revenge against the man who once hired him, Jameson.

THE VILLAINS YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO CAUSE YOU SOME TROUBLE

SHOCKER

FIRST APPEARANCE: *The Amazing Spider-Man #46*
In his original form Herman Schultz built his own super-powered suit as a means to be a more effective criminal. The lifelong malcontent used the Shocker suit to blast shockwaves through bank vault doors in a string of robberies. Seems like that last part hasn't changed.

"NEW YORK CITY'S REALLY KNOWN FOR HAVING A LOT OF FIRE ESCAPES. THOSE ARE A TRAVERSAL NIGHTMARE"

CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS

"This is by far the biggest open-world game that we have ever made. It's several, several times larger than the world we created for *Sunset Overdrive*," Intihar tells us, and we begin to interject with a question regarding content, only for

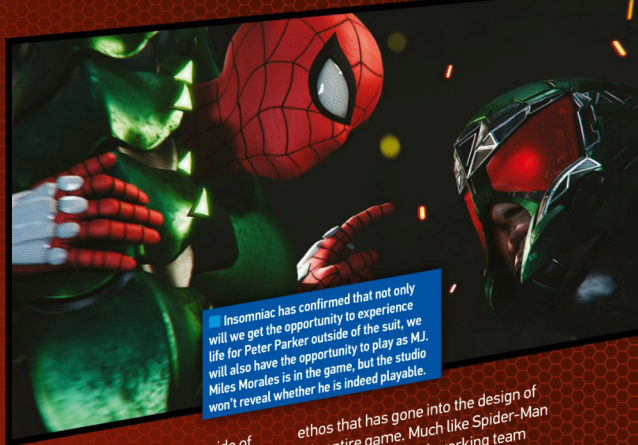
him to leap back in. "Man, it's massively, massively bigger."

You don't need to tell Insomniac that it has created something truly ridiculous in *Spider-Man*. The studio is only too aware of the scale and scope of this project and of the expectations that naturally comes with that.

With so much focus on the swinging, on the story and on the combat it can be all too easy to ignore the playground all of this is occurring in. When Intihar tells us "very early on we decided that we wanted — we needed — to treat New York City as a character," it doesn't sound like mere hyperbole. This is a living and breathing game space, open from the beginning of the game for you to patrol and explore. That's been yet another challenge for Insomniac — its spaces are, traditionally, filled with enemies and little else. That isn't the case here. "A big part of the feeling of being in that place [NYC] is the people,

so as he falls he gets sucked to the side of the building."

That isn't the only concession the team has had to make. A standard metric in open-world game design will see the player character looting resources off of enemy corpses, rummaging through boxes in the world and generally doing anything they can to line their pockets. But Peter is in the business of stopping thieves, not becoming one just to purchase new upgrades, suits or abilities. "Obviously, we don't want... Peter's not stealing money and he's not going to be rummaging through the garbage. This was a challenge but I definitely think we met it," continues Intihar. "We just had to think about it a little bit harder. It's one thing about the character, of the challenges with the character, but thankfully I work with a lot of smart people and they figured all of this out. It's something we have been conscious of and, you know, we just want to be respectful to the franchise."



Insomniac has confirmed that not only will we get the opportunity to experience life for Peter Parker outside of the suit, we will also have the opportunity to play as MJ. Miles Morales is in the game, but the studio won't reveal whether he is indeed playable.

It's the movement of the city outside of Spider-Man, or outside of you. We had to do New York City as New York City. It couldn't just be an empty space. That doesn't feel like Spider-Man to me. He needs to interact with pedestrians and you need to see them reacting to crimes and to what's happening around them."

Insomniac's NYC has hundreds of NPCs on foot and in vehicles, all of them dynamically reacting to Spider-Man's presence and to crimes happening around them. There's a main quest to be followed and collectibles packed into almost every corner of the main Manhattan Island — the game world comprised of eight main districts spanning Hell's Kitchen, Harlem, the Financial District, the Upper East Side and more. There are side quests aplenty, with the likes of Black Cat and Taskmaster off in the background causing havoc for you to put a stop too, while old friend Harry Osborn tasks you with keeping an eye on Oscorp research facilities strewn across the city's rooftops.

"Our environment team and our gameplay design team really put a lot of time and effort to make all of that, and to make sure it doesn't feel like it's ever interrupting traversal or combat," ever interrupting traversal or combat, really considers Intihar. "It was really, really important for us from a world-building standpoint not just to have everything be a perfect box. If you look at any city, a lot of buildings have different shapes. Like, for example, New York City's really known for having a lot of fire escapes. Those are a traversal nightmare. It isn't what you want to be dealing with when you're swinging, right?"

"But the truth is, we should deal with that because this is Spider-Man. We put a lot of time into him just being able to... say you're on the ground and you start moving up to the rooftop, you can literally just web your way up through that fire escape. Say you are swinging, by a building and you start wall running, and you're going right into a fire escape, he literally just hops over or under it and keeps going," says Intihar, effectively giving us a wonderful insight into the

ethos that has gone into the design of this entire game. Much like Spider-Man himself, for this hard-working team there is no problem too big to overcome.

This is Marvel's biggest investment into the interactive entertainment space to date. It's also the first time that Insomniac has ever worked on another company's Intellectual Property in its 24-year history. *Spider-Man* is important to everybody involved in production and it is being treated as such. The result of all of that work is becoming clearer by the day: this is the Spider-Man experience that a hell of a lot of people have been waiting for and one that, frankly, many of us never thought we would ever receive.

Insomniac was approached by Marvel and Sony to work on *Spider-Man* for a reason. We believe that it is truly the only studio currently active in the industry that stands a chance at bringing this character, and his world, to life in a way that both stays true to his legacy and can function as a fantastic videogame — those two elements, as history has proven, aren't always easily interchangeable.

"I didn't know if Ted [Price] would go for it initially," Intihar laughs, explaining that the CEO and president would only sign off on the project if it were met with the necessary enthusiasm internally. "But when he presented the opportunity to us it was a resounding, 'Yes!' in the studio. 'The first time that Marvel logo came up in a meeting, you could hear almost every body [gasp] — like a big, deep breath. If it weren't for that reaction we probably wouldn't have done it.'"

So, has it been worth it? The creative director is clearly eager for fans to get *Spider-Man* into their hands come 7 September 2018 to try it for themselves, but in the meantime he is comforted by one indisputable fact: his folks finally understand what he is doing with his career. "You know, this is the first time in my life where I don't have to explain to my parents what I'm doing," Intihar says, erupting into laughter once again. "I just say 'it's Spider-Man' and they get it right away."

SILVER SABLE

FIRST APPEARANCE: *The Amazing Spider-Man #265*
More often an anti-hero figure than an antagonist for Spider-Man, Silver Sablinaova is a mercenary who in this game is hired by NYC's current Mayor, Norman Osborn, to hunt down, capture and possibly kill our friendly neighbourhood web-slinger. Fingers crossed she'll see sense later.



THE EVER-ITERATING FOOTBALL SERIES IS TAKING
ANOTHER LEAP FORWARD, BUT THIS TIME IT'S MORE
ABOUT PLAYER EMPOWERMENT THAN TECHNOLOGY

15 WAYS FIFA 19

IS LETTING YOU PLAY YOUR WAY

KICK-OFF UPGRADE

1 You're either a Beatles person or an Elvis person, so *Pulp Fiction* told us. You can like both, but you have to be more one than the other. FIFA is kind of similar. You might be a FIFA player, but either you *really* like FIFA Ultimate Team or playing Career or The Journey, or just playing against friends in the friendly mode. Well, EA has been working those more involved modes for years, but what it calls Kick-Off, the straight-to-the-pitch, one-off friendly mode that you play locally with friends, not so much. That all changes this year, with a lot more customisation and variety on offer that will open up the mode to let you play it the way you want to.

HOUSE RULES

2 Part of the expansion of Kick-Off is about letting you play your way, and in some ways codifying things we were already doing and making them official. For instance, how often have you played against a friend and said you would play a best of three matches? Or maybe you've said the first to three goals is the overall winner? Perhaps you miss the days when you could turn off fouls, bookings and everything else and just create carnage on the pitch? Good, because now you can. Settings for matches and goals, as well as a no rules mode, are all available in The New Kick-Off Mode so that you can structure your game time in a more interesting way.

MAKING MESS-ABOUTS REAL

3 Now we get into the really cool stuff. We don't know about you, but we have definitely done things like say that only goals from distance count, or headers and volleys only. Well, Kick-Off Mode has those options now too, so when you square off against someone, or even the AI, you can set the game to only allow goals from outside the area, or only accept goals that are headers or volleys. That's kind of crazy, right? FIFA is actually making that an official way to experience the game, breaking free of the strictures of being an officially licensed football game to make those quick, mess-about games something real, and less reliant on an honour system among friends.

CRAZY NEW IDEAS

4 Perhaps our favourite addition to Kick-Off Mode, though, is Survival mode. Chances are it is exactly what you think it is: score a goal, and one of your players has to leave the pitch. So for every goal you go down to ten, then nine, then eight players, and so on. The player you lose is random, so it could completely mess with your team's shape, and it will definitely open up opportunities for the other side. It's an amazing leveller, and a way to create new tension between seasoned players. Plus, the tactical approach is fascinating. Do you try to hold on and score late? Or maybe let in a couple to get a player advantage and build momentum later? It's a lot of fun.

ADVANTAGE SETTINGS

5 If the concept of losing players one at a time doesn't sound like it's going to close the gap enough between you and your opponent then you'll be pleased to hear that Kick-Off Mode also includes Advantage settings. Clicking in the right stick on the team selection screen brings up the option to change the AI intelligence on each team and allocate pre-match goals. So, say you're playing against a younger player, you could give them a two-goal head start and set your AI to Semi-Pro while they have Legendary players, and see if that makes the experience a little more even. Or you could just really challenge yourself against tougher opposition. It's really up to you.

“YOU CAN NOW MAKE YOUR FRIENDLY GAME INTO A CUP FINAL, SEMI FINAL OR GROUP GAME IN A COMPETITION LIKE THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE OR EUROPA LEAGUE”

ADD SOME STYLE

6 If you have been a player who only really plays FIFA through Kick-Off Mode then that also means you’ve not ever had the pleasure of getting the full atmosphere and ceremony of a cup final or a game that means something in career mode or in competitions in Ultimate Team. As you might have guessed by now, this is no longer the case. You can now make your friendly game into a cup final, semi final or group game in a competition like the Champions League or Europa League, also newly added to FIFA, having grabbed the official licenses this year. There’s really nothing like that anthem before kick off to get the hairs on your arms standing up.

TRACK YOUR STATS

7 The last important addition to The New Kick-Off Mode is your Kick-Off Name, a new ID tracking system that means every friendly contest you enter into, online or otherwise, is tracked. Your Kick-Off ID is separate from your EA Account or your console login, but can be linked to EA’s network or to a PSN account. EA is still working on linking it to Gamertags on Xbox, but we don’t imagine it will be too big an issue. And your Kick-Off account doesn’t just track your wins and losses; you can see what your possession stats look like for all games, what parts of the pitch you attack most often, and so much more.

ACTIVE TOUCH AND BETTER MOVEMENT

8 No FIFA game would be complete without a little technical enhancement and jargon, and that’s delivered nicely by Active Touch, which is what EA is calling its improved player animation and physics system. There’s far greater fluidity in the responses you’ll get from players when they attack the ball now, making far more effort with any part of their body to take control (within the laws of the game, of course). Players seem to understand their own physicality better than before, stretching for the ball when it comes near and diving to head the ball even in open play if it’s the only thing possible. You should find that the game is far more responsive to your commands and moves.



QUICK FLICKS

9 Thanks to the Active Touch system, players are far more reactive than they used to be, and that means they can handle the ball coming at them in all sorts of new ways. By extension, this means new tricks are possible, one of the most exciting of which is being able to flick the ball up by clicking in the right stick. You can press it before receiving the ball to lift the ball a little as you get it, or flick it on the run. And from the lofted position you can keep the tricks going by turning or hitting the ball on the volley. With a player with high-level skills, this little addition can be used to pull off some stunning new tricks that will result in really incredible goals.

DYNAMIC TACTICS

10 Having more control over your players goes beyond them just reacting to your controller inputs more frequently. *FIFA 19* introduces greater control over your tactical play with customised on-the-fly tactics. So rather than just pressing left and right on the D-pad to go to more attacking or defensive variations on what you're already doing, you can actually create custom presets for each setting to define what you need. Maybe defensive for you means playing possession football and sitting back behind the ball with no press, or perhaps ultra defensive is long ball, but only two players attacking the box. And attacking might mean pushing players wider, or a higher press or more crosses. You get to decide how your team interprets those commands.

50/50 BATTLES

11

So, this is a little peeve we had with FIFA in the past, and it's one that EA was apparently getting annoyed about too; players not really challenging for the ball and dodging out of the way. You see, the system before had a tendency to decide that one player had the ball over another, but a new 50/50 system means that if you want to, loose balls can be fought for. Ultimately, it will be the players' stats in strength, speed, balance and tackling that will determine the outcome, along with your own timing. Now those loose balls can be contested the way you want them to be, and not just allowed to run away from you.

TIMED FINISHING

12

This is a big one, and for particularly experienced and skilled players it could make a massive difference to your performance, as Timed Finishing allows for a risk-versus-reward gamble that could turn a pot shot into a screamer or a acrobatic bit of wishful thinking into a wonder goal. It works a little like active reload in *Gears Of War* where you have the chance to press shoot twice, and if you time it right you can add more power, accuracy or swerve (depending on what's needed) to the effort. You don't need to use it; pressing shoot once will work as normal, but it can be very effective. And the trainer shows a meter for learning this technique if you want.

**"GETTING THE CHANCE TO
WATCH THE VERY BEST PLAYERS
FROM THE WEEKEND LEAGUE
BATTLE IT OUT SHOULD SOUND
LIKE AN INVITING PROSPECT"**

FUT DIVISION RIVALS

13 Being able to control your experience of *FIFA 19* extends rather nicely into *FIFA Ultimate Team* this year too. As well as having Champions League and Europa League packs and all of the trappings of those competitions, you will also have the Division Rivals system, a new kind of ranked online multiplayer through which you earn Champions Points. There are ten divisions of similarly skilled players, and your placement within these divisions will be decided by weekly competitions (after some qualifying games that determine where you start). Points can be banked, and you can earn your way into the Weekend League, the big FUT competition.

“YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO PRESS SHOOT TWICE, AND IF YOU TIME IT RIGHT YOU CAN ADD MORE POWER, ACCURACY OR SWERVE (DEPENDING ON WHAT’S NEEDED) TO THE EFFORT”

WATCH THE CHAMPS

14 Whether you’ve been playing FUT for years or are just starting out in *FIFA 19*, getting the chance to watch the very best players from the Weekend League battle it out should sound like an inviting prospect. But what if you could see more than just the way they play, but how they do it too? *FIFA 19* will introduce the ability to see a mock-up of the gamepad on screen, so you can watch exactly what button inputs are being used to pull off the moves and tricks players are using. It should prove to be an amazing learning tool, not least for mastering some of the game’s new features.

PLAYER PICK PACKS

15 Wrapping up how FUT is more clearly tailored to your skill level and needs, Player Pick Packs will allow you to pick from one of five Gold players in the pack. So, with these special packs (one of which you can get as a *FIFA 19* preorder, and is Champions League themed) you can choose the Gold player who best suits your system, the chemistry of your side or any other metric you want to use. That should mean much better value from your investment, making sure that you really get something worth your while for the FUT pack purchase. It will be interesting to see how else packs might be innovated on to keep them fair and enticing as the loot box debate rages on.



IN THE CROSS

HOW WARFACE IS TRYING TO NAVIGATE THE WARZONE OF FREE-TO-PLAY SHOOTERS TO CONQUER CONSOLES

Allods Team and Mail.ru are walking into one of the most hotly contested warzones between gamers and game-makers around today. The crux of the contention is on how free-to-play gaming can best be managed, leveraged and experienced so that game-makers and publishers can make the money needed to keep moving forward, while also allowing players an experience that doesn't feel like they're being squeezed for cash. It's about innovative ways of delivering games to players in a crowded marketplace where our money doesn't stretch far enough to allow us access to everything. It's about gamers who want to feel like their skills in the game mean that they can be competitive even if they don't spend a penny. It's about fairness. It's about consumer rights. It's about entitlement.

It's about profit. It's about everything that clashes when commercialism and art collide, and Warface is returning to consoles in the midst of all of it.

But Mail.ru doesn't seem too put off by all of this. In fact, when we caught up with project manager Alexander Shimov to talk about the transition of the PC version of *Warface* to PS4 and Xbox One (having picked up the free-to-play shooter from Crytek in early 2017), he seemed quite happy with how *Warface* is positioning itself in the market.

"We don't look at this as pay to win, as we're really happy that everyone can play the game without paying for it and for consoles especially, knowing that there is some... not frustration exactly, but people are afraid of monetisation, they're uncomfortable. We plan to tweak it and tune it to make sure that everything

CROSSFIRE



in the game can be acquired just by playing it without crazy objectives," Shimov explains to us. And while there are items in the game that have better stats than others and can be bought with in-game currency, the currency itself is also earned through play, so it's not locked away from players who just play for free, "like as a reward for playing the game every day or something like that," adds Shimov. When we originally sampled *Warface* a few years back, we described its store infrastructure as restrained, and that looks to have remained the same, even if the rest of the game has expanded and evolved considerably.

So much of what *Warface* is was ultimately inherited from Mail.ru's purchase of the rights of the game from Crytek in early 2017. Since then its development has been passed to the publisher's

in-house developer Allods Team in Moscow. This team has previously worked on *Skyforge* in collaboration with Obsidian Entertainment. It has learnt a lot from its experience with that game, which was also released for free, and adapting its features to improve on its mixed reception.

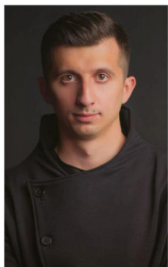
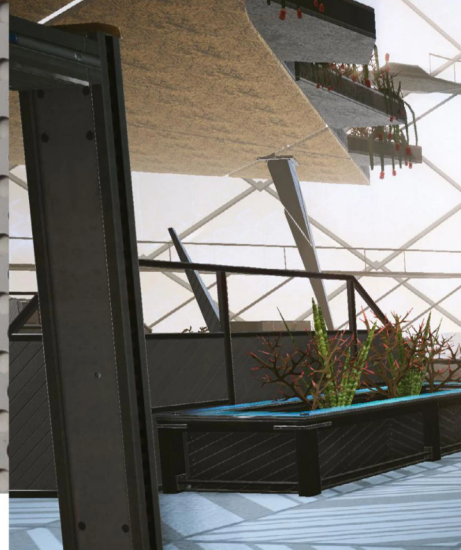
While the arguments over what constitutes good and bad free-to-play practices, what the line is between pay to win and natural player progression, rages on and might be fiercer than ever, it would be fair to say that free-to-play has never been in a better position than now. *Fortnite* is obviously the big cultural phenomenon of the moment, but *Warframe* has been doing incredibly well of late, as has *Paladins*, *Raiders*, *H1Z1* and more. The disdain with which many gamers once looked upon this release model has largely

faded away, even if it's been replaced with a vigilant distrust. *Warface* seems to be taking all of the right lessons from what others have been doing, as well as the evolving face of the game in its PC incarnation and the aborted release of the game on Xbox 360 under its original developer, Crytek.

"Especially on consoles it was tough," says Shimov of the environment for free-to-play games not long ago. "What we like is that *Warface* is about co-operative and competitive play at the same time. You can play with friends, and we also think it's trending right now, this socialising part of play. People want to play together. *Warface* has a battle royale mode. It's unique, fast-paced and a bit different from *Fortnite* or *PUBG*. Also, it has the PvE content like the Special Operations content that are really cool and »



There are tons of customisation options for your different characters in the game as each class type can be given new armour and outfits to your preference. These will cost you some in-game currency though.



"WE FIRST OF ALL WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT PVP IS COMPETITIVE BECAUSE IT'S ONE OF THE BEST FEATURES OF WARFACE"

ALEXANDER SHIMOV,
PROJECT MANAGER



fun. And then there's PvP as well. So it has quite a lot to offer."

The variety of what *Warface* has to offer certainly stands it apart from the current crop of free games out there at the moment, which have tended to find some of their success through how specialised they are. It also stands it apart from the original release from Crytek, which while varied for its time has been built upon considerably since the original PC release. And, of course, there was that Xbox 360 version of the game that only lasted about nine months before being pulled from the store. That left Allods Team with the tricky task of converting the PC build of the game to console from scratch and without the kind of inherent understanding of the engine that Crytek would have enjoyed first time around.

"There were two most difficult parts," Shimov told us as we discussed the challenge of inheriting a PC game and converting it for console play. "The first was the way you look around and the motion components when you need to make the camera controls feel right. How you look around, how you move around a level. There are a lot of different parameters, and we looked into a lot of consoles that have the gamepad. Every game actually kind of had similar controls, albeit in their own way. They have something in common. There's the snapping, there's some slowing down or some following function for the cursor, but every game makes it a bit different in terms of tuning.

"Then the aim assist, that was really a tricky thing to do. We have PvE and PvP, and we first of all wanted to make sure that PvP is competitive, because it's one of

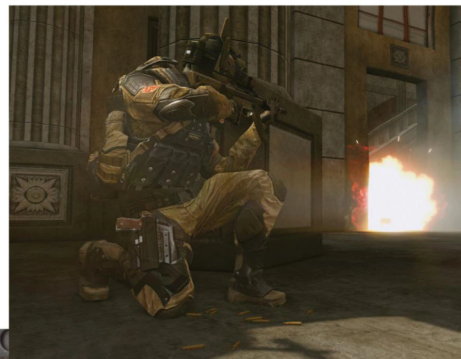
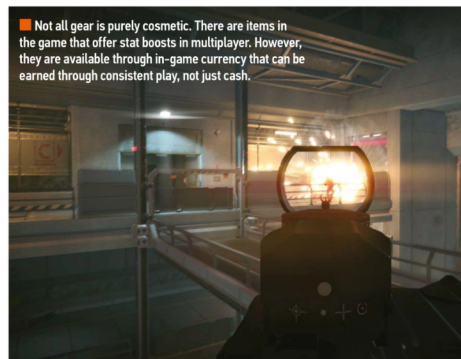
the best features of *Warface*. Some games switch aim assist completely off in PvP, but we decided to leave it on. We've made it much looser than in PvE though. It still helps you a little bit, but just a little bit."

From our extended hands-on time with the game, we would say that Allods Team has done an excellent job of managing that transition. The gamepad layout is very intuitive, the controls feel sharp and responsive, and the snapping of bringing up the iron sights feels very familiar. There's a tightness to the overall feel of the game, especially in PvP from our experience, that is very reminiscent of classic Call Of Duty gameplay. The game has heft in its weapons and weight in its movement, but not so much to make the experience plodding, and it doesn't feel the need to augment that with speed boost armour or parkour traversal. It almost feels like a bit of a throwback, but a welcome one. Of course, much of that was there already.

"Talking about the gameplay itself, it really fits in very well with consoles," Shimov enthuses. "Basically, we left everything intact that was in the PC version, and it really felt just right after we played a lot on consoles, how we implemented the control scheme for gamepad support. It really felt good for the team, and we got very good feedback from the players who we invited for internal playtests."

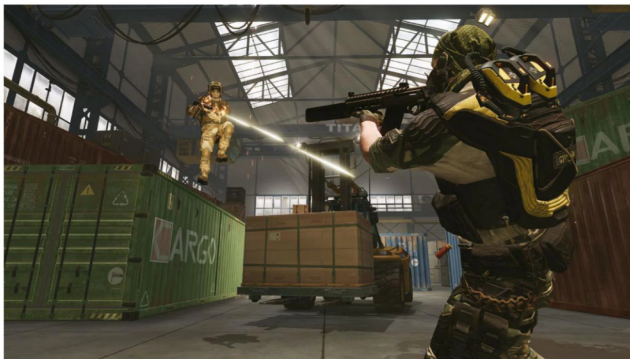
So in some ways that has helped the transition, but that still left a series of technical challenges to overcome as well. "*Warface* was released four years ago, and it runs on CryEngine 3 with some enhancements because Crytek did a very good job of making it graphically very beautiful," explains Shimov. "But we needed to introduce PlayStation 4 and Xbox

Not all gear is purely cosmetic. There are items in the game that offer stat boosts in multiplayer. However, they are available through in-game currency that can be earned through consistent play, not just cash.





Some of the Crytek heritage can still be seen in some of the armour design in the game, but Mail.ru appears to be making *Warface* its own with each passing update and new feature.

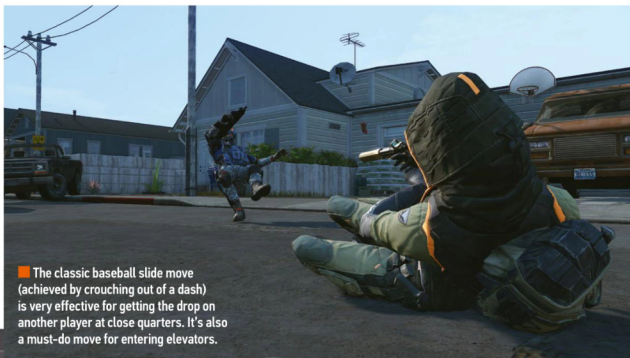


WARFACE ROYALE

HOW ALLODS TEAM IS TAKING ON THE POPULAR GENRE

In among the array of PvE and PvP game modes that *Warface* offers, you will see that a battle royale mode has been included in the mix. This is a relatively new addition, and a bit different from what you'll experience elsewhere. For a start, *Warface* is solely first-person, and that makes a big difference to the feel of the experience. Then, there's the number of players, which is 32 rather than the traditional 100.

What this means is that battles last for an average of five to seven minutes, according to the development team, with everyone landing in the game with melee weapons only, after which they must loot around for weapons and then attempt to take out the other 31 players on the map. There are more than 70 different weapons that can spawn in the game, so the variety of armaments is extensive, but your ammo won't be. Each gun will only hold one clip, so resource management is essential. How you time your engagement and how accurate you can be is vitally important.



The classic baseball slide move (achieved by crouching out of a dash) is very effective for getting the drop on another player at close quarters. It's also a must-do move for entering elevators.

"WHAT WE LIKE IS THAT WARFACE IS ABOUT CO-OPERATIVE AND COMPETITIVE PLAY AT THE SAME TIME"

ALEXANDER SHIMOV,
PROJECT MANAGER



SPECIAL OPERATIONS

THE CO-OP MODE THAT HAS LEGS FOR WARFACE

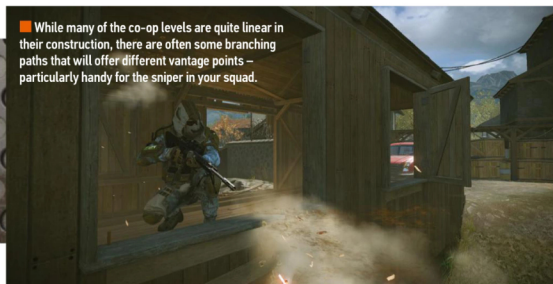


Warface has two different co-op styles that you can take a crack at. The regular co-op missions vary in style, but are either a Traverse, Seek And Destroy, Arena, Safari or Escort styles. Special Operations are a little more involved, offering something more like a raid style of gameplay. They last a little longer, have multiple locations, boss battles, unique locations for the game and a running narrative that gives you some insight into the background story of Warface. Ammo is easily depleted in this mode, as is health, so you'll need a balanced squad of class types to make sure you have someone keeping ammo stocked and a medic to revive the team. Even in easier difficulties, you can fall apart if your squad isn't made up correctly and on hard you will be lucky to survive just a few stages of the game.

■ Multiplayer in Warface feels a lot like classic FPS gaming of the last generation, which is no knock on our part. We like how stripped down the experience is, relying on shooting skill and accuracy over familiarity with any unique tricks or moves.



■ While many of the co-op levels are quite linear in their construction, there are often some branching paths that will offer different vantage points – particularly handy for the sniper in your squad.



One support that wasn't possible with this version of CryEngine. Our engineers are very talented, and we have a really talented team, and we really liked the game, which helped us to make it through."

And then there are the smaller details that needed to be addressed in some fashion, such as UI, which can often translate poorly from PC to consoles as a up-close monitor setup is replaced with a more distanced living room arrangement. Allods Team has its own challenges with this as well. "[The UI] is always a pain, especially if the game was developed only for PC at first without having in mind the console version," Shimov begins. "It's just very difficult. So we decided to not build it from the ground up, because we want very smooth updates, and we want to make them simultaneously on all platforms, so if we were to rebuild the UI completely without touching the PC version it would be very difficult to achieve. But we have plans about updating some of the UI in both versions to make sure that they are good for all of the audience."

This strikes us as a sensible approach, which probably summarises how Allods Team is taking this challenge on rather nicely. As we've said, this game is launching into the cauldron of free-to-play on consoles

with a lot of different ideas and arguments raging, but it appears to be navigating them well. Another example of that would be cross play, which has been a cause of consternation for PS4 players in particular. Warface will not be cross play for any platform, and the reasons are mostly to do with offering the fairest and most consistent player experience.

"We mostly worry about this fair play between different audiences because we have found Warface to be very competitive in its nature, and we think it's just unfair to mix up the control schemes that are so different. On PC you don't have aim assist, but really sometimes that works even better than PC for PvP play. It would also be unfair there. As for PvP, we actually did playtests between PC and console gamers when we implemented the aim assist, and it was sometimes even quite even between good PC players and good console players, but still PC had an advantage. We decided to make it fair, so there will be three ecosystems of Xbox, PlayStation and PC. And Xbox crossplay with PlayStation isn't possible because of Sony and Microsoft issues."

The other side of this is that Allods Team and Mail.ru want to continue to support Warface as a

going esports concern and to offer opportunities for console players to play a part. Keeping the platforms separate seems like the best way of keeping that side of the multiplayer experience competitive and fair. "We plan to introduce and implement this PlayStation 4 tournaments feature because it fits very well with the Warface esports component," Shimov tells us. "In the future we want to implement an in-game tournament system that will also make it possible for Xbox players to participate in tournaments. Our long-term plan is that we would like to have LAN finals not only for PC like we already have with Warface Cups, but also for consoles. LAN finals for consoles would be amazing."

This is an exciting new chapter in the Warface story. It was a game that didn't really excite or offend greatly on its initial release, that failed on Xbox 360 by any estimation and that was let go by Crytek in early 2017 without too much fuss. But now, with a console relaunch about to take place and with so many gameplay options available, this could be a big free-to-play success. If you're looking for some classic FPS multiplayer and co-op gameplay that feels polished and balanced, you would be hard pressed to find much better value at the moment.

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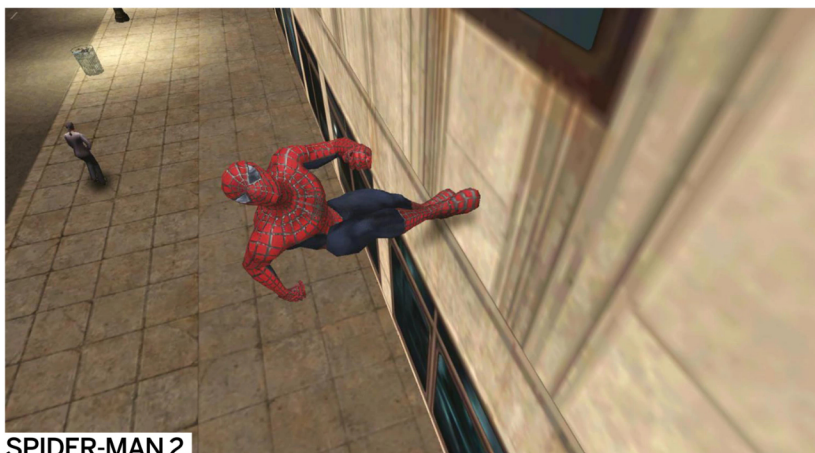


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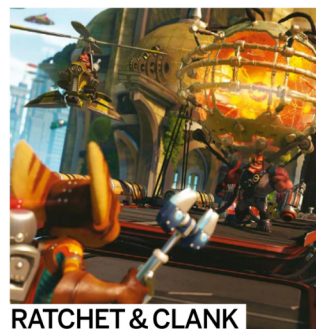
★★★★★ TEN OF THE BEST ★★★★★ INSOMNIAC INFLUENCES

THE GAMES THAT INSPIRED 2018'S SPIDER-MAN



SPIDER-MAN 2

■ **THERE IS PERHAPS** no bigger influence on Insomniac's upcoming Spider-Man than Treyarch's legendary 2004 effort, *Spider-Man 2*. The game set a standard for which all future Spider-Man games would be compared against, thanks to its innovative physics-based web swinging across a sprawling 3D space. Insomniac knew that for its title to be a success it would not only have to match *Spider-Man 2* in this respect, but surpass it entirely – something we truly believe it has achieved with ease.



RATCHET & CLANK

■ **INSOMNIAC HAS ALWAYS** been known for packing its games with humour and for its fun approach to weapon design. These two elements of the studio's identity emerged in the Ratchet & Clank series and have been dutifully refined over the last 16 years. This fun action-platformer presented a development space that allowed Insomniac to experiment and grow, giving it the tools necessary to take on a project such as *Spider-Man*.



BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

■ **ROCKSTEADY'S BATMAN GAMES** have influenced so many in this industry, including Insomniac. In fact, the studio was always eager to create Marvel's very own version of the Arkham games. We are seeing the results of

that now, with *Spider-Man* taking the basics of the *Arkham City* combat model before redefining it for a character that is far more improvisational and acrobatic. It's fascinating to see how the lines of influence connect here.



SPIDER-MAN: WEB OF SHADOWS

■ **COMBAT IS THE** element that Spider-Man games have often struggled with, although 2008's *Web Of Shadows* made a decent run at it. The boss fights were particularly impressive, something that we believe Insomniac has certainly drawn on as it seeks to imbue its title with interesting and exciting encounters with Spidey's greatest foes

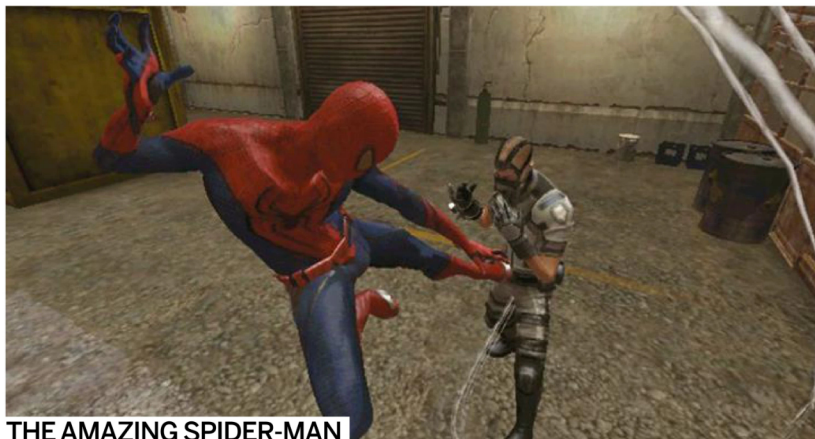


SPIDER-MAN: SHATTERED DIMENSIONS

■ **ACTIVISION HAD CONTROL** over the Spider-Man brand through much of the noughts and it often had more failure with it than successes. But if there's any one game Insomniac could look to for inspiration it should be Beenox's 2010 effort *Shattered Dimensions*. Giving players the opportunity to play as four variants of Spider-Man from across different universes, it was a fun showcase of how rich the character's history is and what can be achieved by going out on a limb with the license.

SUNSET OVERDRIVE

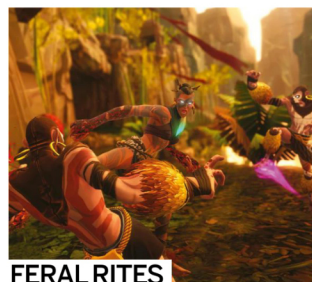
■ **WE AREN'T ALL** that happy about featuring an Xbox exclusive here either... but the truth is Insomniac wouldn't have been capable of building *Spider-Man* had it not been for *Sunset Overdrive*. It's one of the reasons the studio attracted the interest of Marvel to begin with; *Sunset* gave the team the know-how to create a huge open world, a space that would also let the team demonstrate its ability to deliver kinetic movement systems.



THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

■ **OKAY, WE KNOW.** *The Amazing Spider-Man* was not a fantastic videogame. In fact, it was actually pretty poor – a lesson in what not to do, right? It was designed to tie-in with the movie it shares a name with, though it failed to capture what made Beenox's previous flirtations

with the franchise so very special. So, why include it in the list? Because the iOS version featured Yuri Lowenthal as the voice of Peter Parker. His work stuck in the minds of Insomniac and now the actor is being brought back in to once again provide the voice of the wall-crawler!



FERAL RITES

■ **AHEAD OF TAKING** on *Spider-Man*, Insomniac had never made a true third-person brawler. Back in 2015, as the ink was drying on the Marvel contract, it also had *Feral Rites* in development – a VR title that gave the studio the opportunity to experiment with camera control and melee-based combat systems. *Feral Rites* may have flown entirely under the radar, but you can see the roots of *Spider-Man*'s combat here.



SPYRO THE DRAGON

■ **THIS 1998 PLATFORMER** is a legitimate classic, undoubtedly putting Insomniac on the path to becoming one of the most respected studios in the world. *Spyro* effectively established Insomniac as a trusted pair of hands with 3D world building and platforming, something it would only continue to expand and iterate on the next twenty years. *Spider-Man* might be worlds away from *Spyro*'s colourful antics, but – and trust us on this one – we wouldn't be receiving *Spider-Man* if it weren't for *Spyro The Dragon*.



RESISTANCE 2

■ **THIS IS A** little bit of a stretch but we felt it was important to at least mention *Resistance* in this list. No, Spidey isn't going to pick up a gun and murder a bunch of enemies in this game *but* the reason it's worth talking about is because this is where many of the *Spider-Man* team started. This includes Bryan Intihar, who progressed from community manager of this title in 2008 to creative director of the biggest PS4 exclusive of 2018 in just 10 years.



"THIS IS A GAME IN WHICH ALL OF THE JAGGED EDGES HAVE BEEN SHAVED DOWN TO A SMOOTH SURFACE"



IGNORE THE NARRATIVE

In an ill-advised move, Ivory Tower has attempted to include some semblance of a narrative within *The Crew 2*. As you hit milestones you're 'treated' to short cut-scenes that are designed to contextualise your performance and inspire you to push towards the next one.

The short of it is that the writing, directing and concepts contained within these moments are terrible and work to undermine your experience, rather than enhance it. These moments are not so regular that they dominate the entire experience, but they are far too frequent given their lack of quality.

Frankly, their inclusion smells of a decision borne out of focus testing non-gamers rather than one that originated from the minds of the design team.



The Crew 2

Big world, small ideas



For all it tries and for all of its small victories, *The Crew 2* ultimately loses its attempt to turn the United States into a vehicular

playground. Certainly, it's a valiant effort and an improvement on the original, but a lack of personality, a reliance on progress-through-repetition and frustratingly implemented artificial intelligence combine to hinder what might have otherwise been a grand road trip.

Its problems are built around comfort. The degree to which developer Ivory Tower strives to make sure players feel comfortable in this digital recreation of the land of the free results in an experience that lacks any of the danger and spectacle that you'd reasonably expect when offered the chance to tear across one of the world's most diverse and interesting environments.

Handling is simplistic and too easy to master, while the race types lack originality, the narrative is achingly awkward in its presentation and the rewards for good performances are predictable – it is far from what we would call aspirational.

This is a game in which all of the jagged edges have been shaved down to a perfectly smooth surface, presumably in the hope that what's presented will insult or harm no one. Unfortunately, that has led to an experience that could at best be described as soothing, and at worst lobotomising.

You find yourself playing simply for the lack of revelations it presents, just as you might rewatch a familiar movie specifically because you know it poses no threat to your intelligence and will simply ask nothing of your mind.

This is a shame because the building blocks for something special are present and correct



AOXO The variety and diversity of vehicles is impressive on paper. Monster trucks, dirt bikes, rally cars, super cars, drag racers, drift racers and 4x4 trucks are all present, but the experiences available from them aren't as interesting as the length of the vehicle list.

and, at times, *The Crew 2* can be enjoyable. The addition of planes over and above the vehicle options in the first game, for instance, gives you the option of exploring the United States by land, sea and air. This provides plenty of potential for setting up your own creative routes across the country and, indeed, it's these self-made moments that represent the best the game has to offer.

Moving from car to plane, plane to bike and bike to boat as the terrain changes is a great way to indulge the single greatest achievement here: the landscape. With planes as an option you never have to rely on fast travelling between locations unless you're short on playing time.

You can stick to the classic Route 66 trail, or forge your own coast-to-coast path. Maybe you want to avoid the coasts altogether and navigate through the central states on a north-to-south route or circumnavigate the whole map (should you have the time).

The charm of moving away from the set tasks only lasts for as long as the views stay fresh and unfamiliar, though. At some point you run out of new sights to see and you need to win events in order to progress in terms of filling out your garage and moving up the leaderboard of racing fame.

It's here that opportunities start to feel missed and it's difficult not to come down hard on *The Crew 2*'s lack of interesting pre-defined events. The events are split between different disciplines, each of which acts to group together racing concepts that vaguely align with one another in terms of their tone and community.

The Pro Racing events are all about competing in the fastest boats, planes and cars the game has to offer. Freestyle focuses on style over flat-out pace, asking you to master stunt planes, monster trucks and jetsprint boats. Then there's Street Racing, featuring drag races, drift competitions and illegal contests throughout the cities, and Offroad events based largely across the map's wilds.

At first the options seem wide-ranging and interesting and there's a lot to pick and

choose from, setting up an expectation that you can focus on the events you like and ignore the rest. In such a way you can define what kind of game you want to play and see.

However, that's not really the reality of the situation. Street races, and their applicable vehicles, aren't different enough from one another to warrant you focusing your energy on mastering them over any of the other available options.

Within each vehicle type a car's top speed might change, but the handling model is too consistent across the board to entice you to want to spend time learning the intricacies of each of them. Flying a plane is nothing like a driving a car, of course, but even here you'll have gotten to grips with all of the available details within a couple of sessions in the cockpit.

The Crew 2 isn't trying to be a simulation and shouldn't be attacked for a lack of realistic handling models, but with so many vehicles to choose from it feels like a missed opportunity to have so little by way of unique personality injected into its showroom line-up. You instead find yourself focusing too much on the design of a car's chassis and its accompanying paint job to give it meaning.

If the vehicle and event options had even 20 per cent of the variety and appeal of the offered environment then this would be a game that might earn a position alongside the Forza Horizon series as an open-world racer of genuine intrigue. Instead, things have been played far too safe here for *The Crew 2* to cross the line as anything other than an opportunity lost.

You need to take risks to earn rewards and, unfortunately, *The Crew 2* fails to do this. Worse, it fails to let its players take any risks within the construct it offers them.

VERDICT

Lack of design risks and personality spoil the ride

5/10

DETAILS

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DEVELOPER

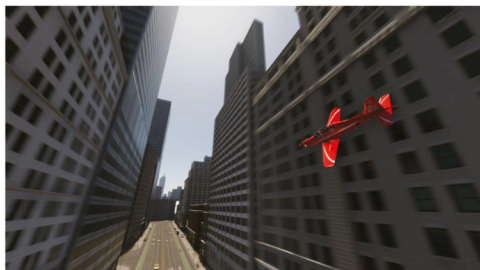
Ivory Tower

PSN PRICE

£49.99

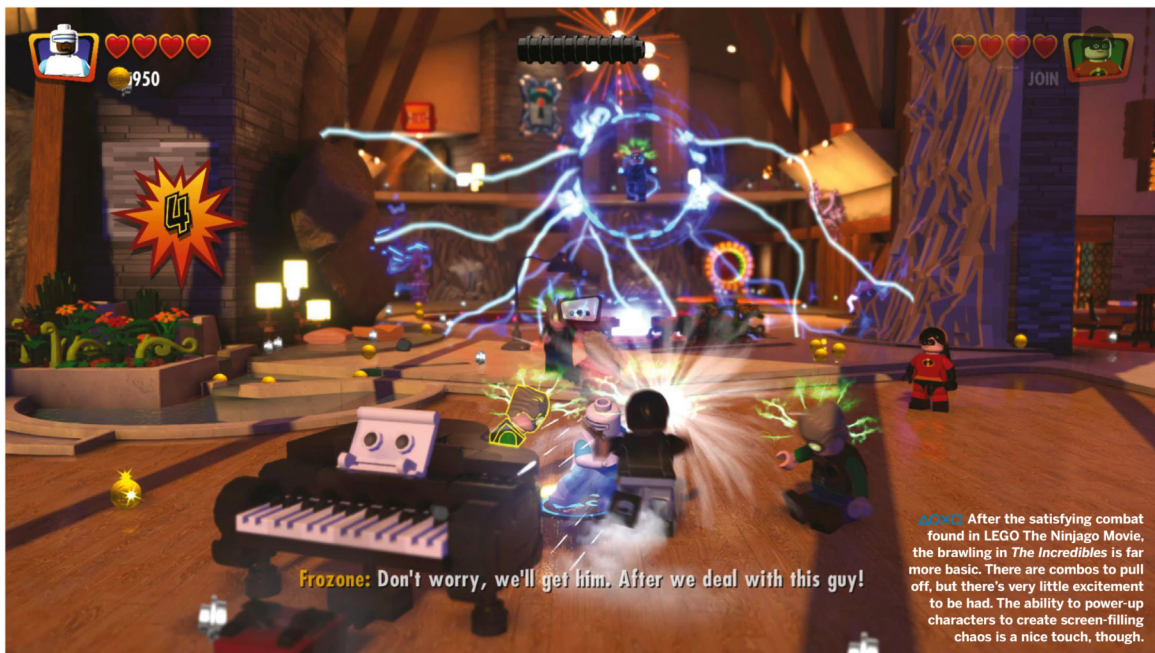
PLAYERS

1 (1-8 Online)



AOXO Performing acrobatics between skyscrapers is fun for a while, but the lack of interesting tasks built into the concept is disappointing.





Frozone: Don't worry, we'll get him. After we deal with this guy!

△Ox△ After the satisfying combat found in *LEGO The Ninjago Movie*, the brawling in *The Incredibles* is far more basic. There are combos to pull off, but there's very little excitement to be had. The ability to power-up characters to create screen-filling chaos is a nice touch, though.

LEGO The Incredibles

Not so much incredible as expendable



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Warner Bros
Interactive
Entertainment
DEVELOPER
TT Fusion
PSN PRICE
£49.99
PLAYERS
1-2



Every now and then a LEGO release comes along that revitalises the long-running franchise and takes the series in fresh and exciting directions. *LEGO The Incredibles* is not that game. Instead it's the gaming equivalent of comfort food, as it offers snackable, familiar gameplay that you'll enjoy while you're consuming it, but you'll get very little nourishment from.

Of course you can argue that it's sheer familiarity is one of the key things that has made the LEGO series so popular in the first place and there's no denying that certain elements of TT Fusion's latest game are enjoyable. The presentation for example is excellent, effortlessly capturing the stylish charm of the movies, while easily introducing familiar LEGO elements like building and blind bags. We're also impressed with how well the gameplay focuses on characters teaming up in order to overcome many of the obstacles and puzzles found throughout the six-hour odd adventure. Mr Incredible uses his strength to lob his family to reach otherwise unreachable ledges, Dash can use his speed to propel Elastigirl while she's in boatform (as he does in the original movie), while Violet can let others enter her

forcefield so they can pass over inhospitable areas. It works really well and nicely plays upon the teamwork that is so prominent in the movies. It's a pity then that the vast majority of their powers (and of the other heroes and villains that you can unlock) are so similar to those we've seen in countless other LEGO games already.

The vast majority of LEGO games have always been built around obvious templates and the same is true here. That's not to say that *LEGO The Incredibles* doesn't attempt to occasionally stretch the mould, but it's far too formulaic a game to actually try breaking it. Multibuilds allow you to break down a creation and then re-use it to build something else, while Family Builds require you to collect a set amount of Incrediblocks before unleashing them in a dull button-bashing minigame sequence. Far stronger are the Crime Wave missions that pop up throughout the hub world. Bookended by entertaining cutscenes you're required to rush around the large overworld solving crimes and helping people, while battling a number of key villains. Sadly, while the hub is quite fun to navigate many of the bricks are extremely easy to find, with many just lying around waiting to be picked up, meaning it's one of the easiest LEGO games we've played.

△Ox△ There are an insanely large number of different vehicles to build and unlock throughout *LEGO The Incredibles*, but they feature the same twitchy and oversensitive controls that plague many of the other games in the series.



LEGO The Incredibles is easily one of the weakest LEGO games we've played for some time, but that doesn't mean it's not entertaining. You're going to get a lot more satisfaction out of it when playing with younger relatives, and the stud collecting isn't as expansive as we'd like but it's still a diverting timewaster.

VERDICT

Lego's 13-year-old series needs serious rebuilding

5/10



Unravel Two

Missing a stitch

ΔΟΧ There's a moodier edge to proceedings in *Unravel Two* and we like the shift as it brings some much needed darkness to contrast with the cute Yarny characters. A threat appears to hang in the air even if it never really arrives.



There's a lot of heart in *Unravel Two*. There's some real love and thought and compassion seeping out of it and that's to be commended.

It's a game that ramps up rather nicely as the various meanings of being a character made of yarn and all of the vulnerabilities and strengths that comes to embody it are revealed and made apparent. It's a game that should be a real tearjerker by its conclusion. But it didn't quite hit us that hard.

So, as we concluded the four or so hours of *Unravel Two*, we were left wondering what was missing? The game has made significant strides forward from its forebear with much improved platforming being the biggest change. The game feels tighter and more controlled than before, which is good. It also looks fantastic with some great level design and that same dense, rich feel to the world. Many of the levels are also set either at night or in darker areas, which despite the bright, hopeful feel of the game overall, actually works really well. It brings a little edge and threat that the original game was sorely lacking.

And there's tandem character/co-op gameplay, which is a welcome addition too. It brings a whole new dimension to the

puzzle platforming as you can either control each yarn character with a friend or switch between them manually on your own. Either way works really well, as thinking about the right place to put each character and how you can use the link of yarn between them can be a nice head-scratcher. There is, however, no real mind-bogglers in there. The pace of the game seemingly taking precedence over any challenge in the central story campaign.

And other than an unheralded and sharp difficulty spike in the last couple of chapters, the real test comes from the 20 challenge levels, with a new set opening up every couple of chapters. These are genuinely difficult, requiring good timing of your swings, but also a lot of improvisation, as you won't always know what comes next or where you're heading.

But still, something is missing and in essence it's that there's something slightly safe about the experience. The attention to detail and the use of a background story throughout of two kids escaping together speaks to a real passion and depth of feeling in the game-makers, but like a piece of art outside a multinational bank, there's an air of the artificial about it. We feel rather harsh saying so, but its beats feel so similar to



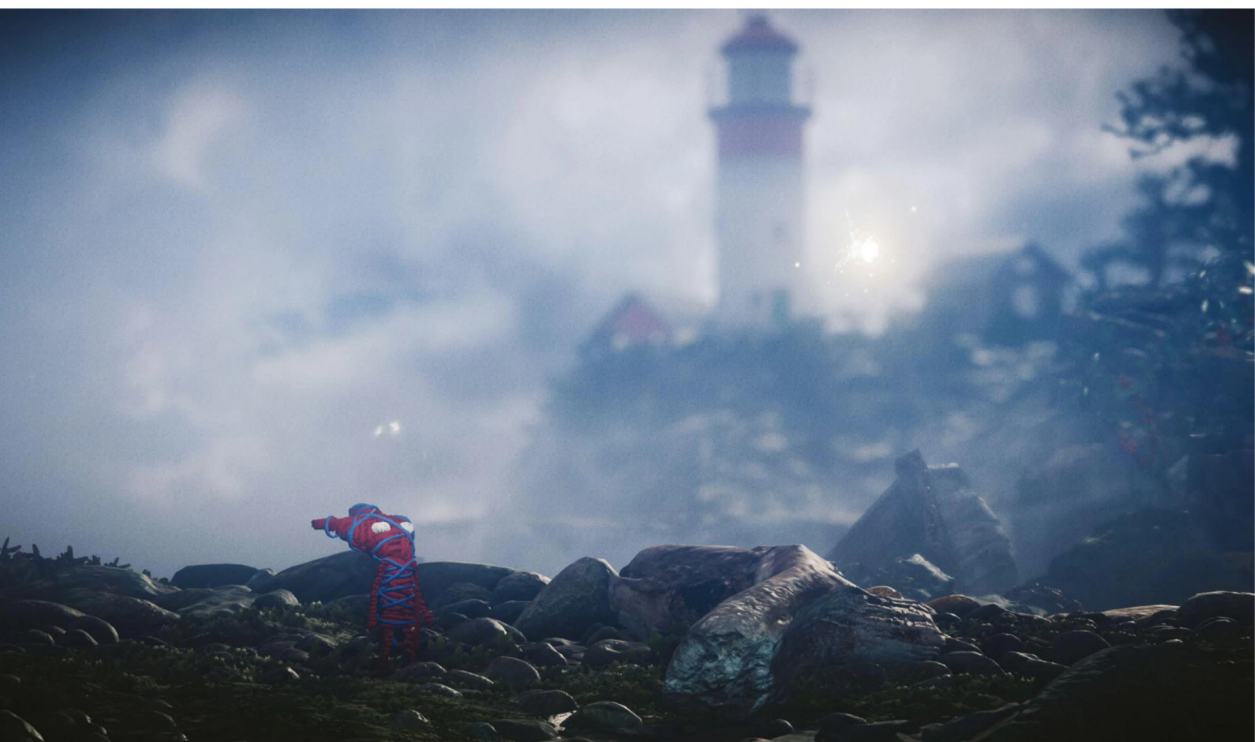
ΔΟΧ As you play through the game you'll see a story play out in smoky outlines of kids running away from adults. How much impact you're having or how much is just a memory is left to you to figure out.

Journey and *Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons* that it feels like a solid homage more than something standing on its own terms. For something light and enjoyable, we would certainly recommend it, but don't expect this one to reach down and really grab a hold of your soul.

VERDICT

A fine continuation on the original's promise

7/10





△×□ No jokes here, we're afraid - Chris has just finished his breakfast but already dad's in his chair, sitting beneath a memory of his glory days as he watches the game with a bottle of whiskey beside him. Ugh, we need a hug.





AOX Chris retreats into his own little world of superheroes and supervillains to counteract his sad, lonely existence, turning everyday chores and events into fun little games to keep himself busy. In his world, the good guys always win.



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Square Enix
DEVELOPER
Dontnod
PSN PRICE
Free
PLAYERS
1



We know what bad guys look like – games have reinforced the stereotype for years. We recognise them even before the menacing

music kicks in.

It's different in *The Awesome Adventures of Captain Spirit*, though. The line between archetypal good and bad characters isn't blurred as much as non-existent, and there's no subtle camera angles or music cues to choreograph how we're supposed to feel about them. But when the good guys do terrible things, and the bad guys are capable of kindness, how *are* we supposed to feel? And what can we do when the decisions we make – the ones made on reckless, feckless impulse – are the wrong ones?

Dontnod's *Life Is Strange* is a supernatural coming-of-age tale, and it's to this universe that we return in *Captain Spirit*. And while we don't, as yet, know how Chris' story fits into *Life Is Strange 2*, we know one thing: our choices matter.

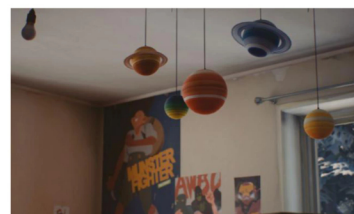
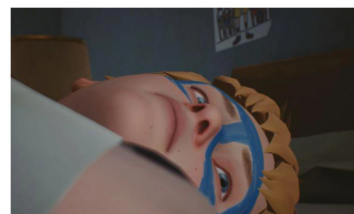
The Awesome Adventures of Captain Spirit

No we're not crying, YOU'RE crying

Clocking in at just a couple of hours long, *Captain Spirit* features just two main characters, and set entirely in and around a single-story, rundown house. We meet Chris, a small kid with an enormous imagination, and it's this ability to fabricate stories that makes up much of *Captain Spirit*'s adventures. A trip to turn on the hot water becomes a battle against the hulking Water Eater, and a miscellaneous pile of rubbish in the yard becomes a secret maze.

And he's a good kid; kind and thoughtful. He completes household chores – laundry, washing up, fixing lunch – without being asked. He talks to himself a lot – a fairly typical side-effect of single-child-ism, we reckon – but as the story ambles along, you'll realise he's lonely, and how immersing himself in a make-believe life is sometimes preferable to his real one.

If you've played any of the previous *Life Is Strange* episodes, the mechanics will feel the same. Beyond a couple of harder-than-you-might-expect puzzles it's pretty much do this, collect that. Occasionally the prompts are



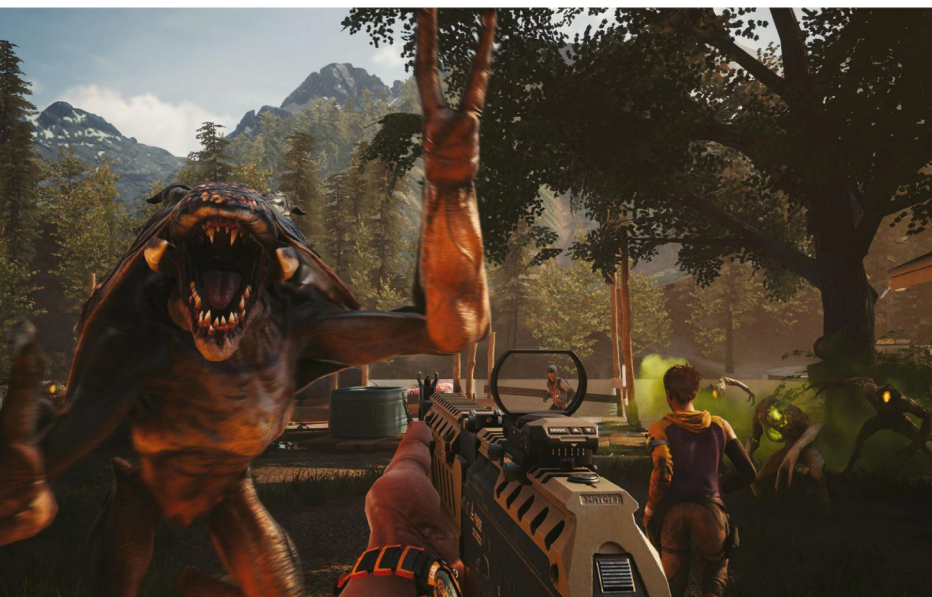
hidden behind the character or props, and every now and then your invisible reticle gets a little twitchy, jumping from one prompt to the next, but the tasks all feel a bit like filler, really; the story is what matters here.

Despite a masterful lack of violence, the story (child bereavement and abuse) is brutal and heartbreaking nonetheless. You feel bad for Chris, and his father, and then furious, and then desperately sad again, which is a lot of emotions to cycle through in such a brief amount of time. And though it feels very much as though everything – from the score, to the graphics, to the little in-game puzzles – is stitched together to be as intentionally emotional as possible, the careful characterisation makes the cast, and story, come to life... even if it is really, *really* tough to watch sometimes.

VERDICT

A tough-to-watch vignette of familial love and loss

7/10

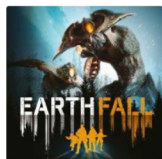


△×× Earthfall has some nice ideas, but so many of them are inseparable from the decade-old *Left 4 Dead*. Holospark deserves credit for bringing this long-dormant formula back to the fore, but it clearly needed a little more time in development.



Earthfall

Lost in time



DETAILS

PUBLISHER

Holospark

DEVELOPER

In-house

PSN PRICE

£29.99

PLAYERS

1-4



Almost everything in this world is made better when there is a gaggle of good friends by your side.

That's true of so many things that you'll encounter in life, regardless of whether you are running activities outdoors or teaming up to fight back an encroaching enemy threat online. In fact, this comes into a particularly sharp focus when considering the realms of online gaming, as even the most rote of multiplayer experiences can become transformed by the addition of a few friends to a game lobby – the lines of communication a muddled mess of in-jokes, bad tactical decisions and howls of laughter that echo long into the night. This is one of the reasons that judging an experience such as *Earthfall* – a cooperative shooter by its very design – can become an exercise in expectation management. Get the right people together and you'll certainly have an enjoyable enough time, though is that because of the game itself or because of the people you're with? In the case of *Earthfall*, any good times that are to be found are largely in spite of the game itself rather than a direct result of anything it has to offer.

It is, truthfully, difficult to separate *Earthfall* from the litany of genre games that have come

before it. That was always to be expected. *Left 4 Dead* and its sequel cast such a monumental shadow over the co-op shooter space that any game that dares step into it will not only inevitably invite comparison but also come off worse because of it. A decade ago Valve South (Turtle Rock Studios) perfected the co-op shooter, setting a benchmark for AI design, expansive linear storytelling and dynamic interplay between characters that simply hasn't been matched since.

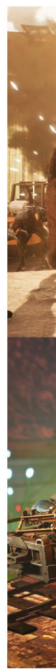
Earthfall is no exception, falling short in just about every respect. It delivers surprisingly few new ideas, seeking to offer little more than a would-be *Left 4 Dead* experience with the zombies swapped out for invading aliens. While the template is certainly recognisable, the game itself fails to nail the basics, let alone innovate on them in any real or immediate sense.

Sending a group of four wayward survivors through ten linear missions, split across two campaigns, *Earthfall* ushers you into the outskirts of an alien invasion. You're tasked with fending off wave after wave of threats, a sea of uncharacteristic drones occasionally punctuated by the appearance of 'special' enemies that seek to divide your group in a number of familiar ways. The Threshers are prone to pouncing, putting one of your crew

temporarily out of commission. The Sappers explode, briefly disorientating anybody caught in the blast radius, while the Whiplashes have a tendency to pull one member out of the action until rescued by a buddy. They are practically one-for-one with the specials of *Left 4 Dead*, albeit with less personality or presence.

One of *Earthfall*'s biggest issues is that it doesn't feel finely tuned. With 10 firearms to be found, you'll find that the weapon handling for each ranges between ropey at best and downright tedious at worst. But if there is any one thing that all of the weapons have in common it's that they all feel suitably underpowered; feedback is a huge issue here, with the sniper rifles and shotguns feeling decidedly floaty and ineffectual, even as you're lopping off alien body parts and bursting heads. If you're connecting bullets with an enemy you want to know about it, you want to feel it in your fingers, particularly as the bruiser bosses come into play.

Perhaps the biggest missed opportunity here, however, is that lack of any real sense of ingrained replayability. The enemy AI systems aren't particularly smart, nor do they ever seem to react in any meaningful way to your successes or failures throughout a campaign; reactive AI is one piece of the *L4D* puzzle that made it such a genuine phenomenon and





AOXO Weapon handling and feedback isn't quite where it needs to be, particularly for an experience so heavily focused around shooting waves of enemies.

“IT DELIVERS SURPRISINGLY FEW NEW IDEAS, OFFERING LITTLE MORE THAN A WOULD-BE LEFT 4 DEAD EXPERIENCE”

its absence is almost immediately noticeable. It's also somewhat surprising to find that *Earthfall* has very little in the way of randomised elements; weapon and item drops are always the same, the objectives never shift, nor does the placement or composition of the enemy waves. All of this only helps to foster a game environment that quickly grows stale, with Holospark offering little more than escalating difficulty modes to help keep players enticed.

All of these problems become somewhat exacerbated depending on how you choose to play. Play in solo and you'll quickly begin to loathe the friendly AI, with its priorities seemingly laser focused on firing at enemies rather than helping you up off the floor. Attempt to jump online and you'll likely encounter some pretty severe connection issues. *Earthfall* offers no easy way to filter games based on connection – in fact, it hides ping entirely – while the lack of any stable host migration

means that, should the host drop out of the game for any reason and at any time, the entire campaign will come to an unceremonious end.

If you were to assemble the right group of friends online you would likely have a good time with *Earthfall*. Approached in a certain way, its numerous idiosyncrasies could give off a hokey B-movie vibe that's easy enough to get behind for a few hours – and we do mean that literally, the two campaigns can be completed as quickly as five hours on regular difficulty.

But when it's all said and done it's difficult to escape the mindset that *Earthfall* has taken the template of a decade-old experience for inspiration and failed to replicate (or expand on) it in any meaningful way.

VERDICT

Earthfall can't escape the shadows of the past

4/10



THE THING™

How this classic movie adaptation attempted to build a sequel to John Carpenter's landmark horror experience

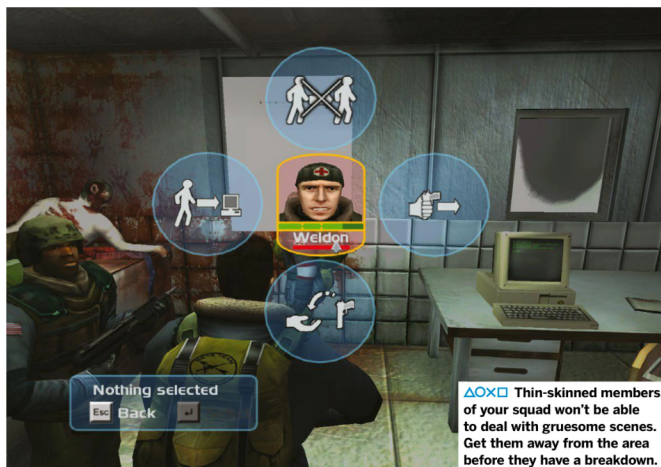
In 1982, horror master John Carpenter, best known for films like *Halloween*, *They Live*, *Big Trouble in Little China* and *Escape from New York*, released *The Thing* to a mostly negative critical reaction.

Seeing it as little more than a cheap vehicle to showcase blood, guts and gore, it wasn't until after its initial release and into the Nineties that it started to gain traction and acclaim. Now seen as one of the – if not the greatest – horror films ever made, it's considered a classic that has found both its audience and well-deserved praise. Based on John W Campbell Jr's 1938 novella *Who Goes There?*, *The Thing* spawned a novelisation, a comic adaptation, a board game and a prequel film in 2011. However, one overlooked entry into the franchise is the 2002 videogame, simply named *The Thing*. Treading the line between familiarity and giving the franchise new and interesting possibilities, it did what most offshoots of the franchise were afraid to do with the acclaimed series: continue it.

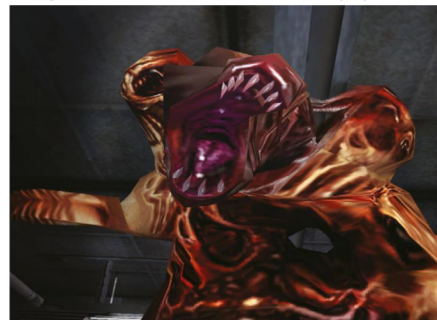
For the uninitiated in the horror masterwork, the film of *The Thing* follows a research team in Antarctica that becomes the prey of an alien creature, one that can perfectly replicate whatever organism it comes into contact with. Never seen in its original form, the alien begins to take the guise of various members of the research team. Alone and isolated in the depths of nowhere, the film plays into the paranoia and mistrust that begins to brew amid the researchers, all the while the alien picks them off one by one.

The game picks up shortly after the climatic events of the film. Planned to be a direct sequel from the outset and inspired by James Cameron's *Aliens*, it focuses on a team of US Special Forces that are sent to investigate what occurred at Outpost 31, the setting of Carpenter's original film. The player takes the role of Captain JF Blake. It doesn't take long before communications are down and the alien begins replicating Blake's team, ultimately leading to a title that offers up action, a tense atmosphere and a team-management system that will have the player second guessing the very

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△×□ The alien can take many different forms, sometimes looking like a mish-mash of different creatures and people.



people who fight alongside them.

Long before working on *The Thing*, most of the team at Computer Artworks were massive fans of the original film. As Diarmid Campbell, lead programmer on the project explains, "I probably first saw it when I was about 12 – it was on TV, and it scared the shit out of me! Everyone was talking about it at school. Though I didn't really appreciate its brilliance until I started working on the game, and so watched the film again as an adult. The setting is open and desolate, but no one can escape. Everyone becomes totally paranoid, and everyone deals with it in their own way. Add to that the slowly picking off of each character one by one, and you get this countdown feeling – it's a brilliant piece of filmmaking! The task of creating a game sequel was both daunting and exciting. The difficulty was that the film is character driven (rather than action driven), but in games, the player typically does actions, so trying to translate the psychological elements into systems you can play was always going to be difficult."

Lead designer Andrew Curtis echoes Campbell's praise for the film. "It has a brilliant cast, haunting music and great tension in a gripping scenario with nowhere to run – and not forgetting some of the best physical special effects in the history of cinema. We saw making the game as a great opportunity for a relatively unknown studio, and were so full of excitement we didn't have time to be troubled by the task ahead."

In speaking about how the team landed the IP for *The Thing*, Curtis says, "We were approached by Universal Interactive, who already had the rights to the IP. The publisher Black Label Games was specifically created by Universal Interactive to avoid a situation where titles like *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro The Dragon* were published under the same label as a horror game about a shape-changing alien flesh monster."

With the IP in place, the team began work on their ambitious continuation of the famed horror film. However, one important piece of *The Thing* puzzle would be missing from this game. As Curtis explains, "John Carpenter didn't seem very interested in videogames, and I think he was too distracted with his film *Ghosts Of Mars*. He did agree to do a signing at E3 to help promote the game, and let us use his likeness for the character Dr Shaun Faraday in the game. Everyone working on the game loved John, but he's definitely not a gamer."

This love and appreciation the developers had for Carpenter's film is very much evident within the game. From the opening levels that take place at Outpost 31 and the Norwegian station that features such recognisable film

THE CANCELLED SEQUEL

The Thing 2 promised to make good on the promises of the original.

Due to the critical and commercial success of *The Thing*, a sequel was on the cards, but despite already starting production, Computer Artworks entered receivership in October 2003, killing the project. **The Thing 2**, taking place right after the ending of the previous game that revealed a surprise appearance by movie protagonist MacReady, would focus on him and Blake trying to survive in a number of different environments, including a small town and an oil rig. The team at Computer Artworks intended to deliver upon the promises made by the previous game, and as Campbell points out, a large part of this was focused on rebuilding and perfecting the UI, Infection System and Fear/Trust mechanics.

"We made a prototype where one random character starts off infected in a level and then when they are alone they infect another. Each time a new character was infected a bone-chilling wail would echo over the ice. We still hadn't solved the problem of how to get that to work with a story, but I think it could have been done by having different types of levels, some which drive the story, others that were more dynamic. In terms of a trust system where NPCs had trust in each other, we made some progress on this. It made for a more interesting system with emergent behaviour – eg help one NPC and all the others who trust him, then start to trust you, but those that did not become your enemy."



△○×□ Each member of your squad at any one time serve a specific purpose, and can ultimately do things that the player simply cannot.



elements as the frozen body of Childs, the spacecraft that was being built by the Blair version of the alien, and the frozen body of the Norwegian researcher that slashed his wrists and throat before the alien could take him, to being able to listen to MacReady's tapes, there's a level of authenticity that is a true love letter to what came before it. However, once the player gets past these nods to the original film, the game begins to carve out its own place within the series, and does so brilliantly.

Though *The Thing* does admittedly take a safe route with its third-person survival horror approach in terms of combat and exploration, Computer Artworks was keen to replicate what the film nailed so perfectly. Curtis explains, "Even though the game moved more towards action horror, we didn't ever want the player to feel safe. At its core the game is about paranoia and tension; the feeling that at any moment you could be ambushed by a twisted alien mutation, or an ally could attempt to kill and assimilate you."

Despite its surface level of familiarity, with a whole host of titles released around the same time, there are three main elements that set it apart from anything that has come before it. The game elements that were intended to be game changing were the User Interface, the Fear/Trust System and the Infection System. As head of the Beta team that has been sent to Outpost 31 to investigate, the player at all times has one to three additional soldiers under their command. Those under the command of the player fall under one of three potential classes: soldier, medic and engineer. Each class serves a distinct purpose during the game, and the player needs to know when and how to use them. From instructing engineers to fix a broken keypad in order to advance through a door to having your medic patch you up after a gruelling battle with an enemy, properly interacting with your squad is

△○×□ If you're not careful you may get lost in the snow fields in the game. Navigate them by using the various flares and lights that link various points of interest together.





the key to survival in *The Thing*.

However, as Campbell explains, creating a user interface to match the team's vision didn't work out as well as they expected, "Originally, the goal was to not have any HUD-type overlay showing the fear/trust values, but to try and communicate everything using animations. However, this was not possible, so we ended up having trust and fear meters for each character that showed up when you enter Interaction mode. The other difficulty was a UI that let you interact with your team mates in the myriad ways the designers wanted. Send an engineer to fix something, medic to heal someone, ask for a weapon, offer a weapon, swap a weapon, heal someone yourself, follow me, stay there etc. On top of this, you sometimes could not perform an action, and we had to communicate why – did you not have the right objects, did your NPC not trust you, was he paralysed with fear? We went through about four fully implemented iterations of the UI before settling on the one we ended up with. It was still rightly criticised for being too complex, but I think it was about as simple as it could be given the complexity of the underlying systems. To make it simpler would have required a redesign of too many other game design systems, and that would have meant redesigning many levels, and there was no time to do that."

The Fear/Trust System was at the heart of *The Thing* experience. Much like the film itself, fear and paranoia runs rampant, which leads to the player constantly having to assess their squad's mental stability and chances that they are the alien. Curtis delves into the Fear/Trust System: "Players had to make decisions about how to arm and manage a squad mate who could potentially turn on them. These kinds of actions could lower their trust in you, eventually causing them to take you down. There were even

THE OTHER MAIN CONSIDERATION WAS MANAGING WHAT HORRORS YOU EXPOSED SQUAD MEMBERS TO, AS THOSE OF A WEAKER DISPOSITION WOULD LOSE THEIR MINDS AND GO GUN CRAZY OR COMMIT SUICIDE

things in the game that players never saw. My favourite was if you just let your squad take out the enemy and you held back, they would suspect you were infected. The other main consideration was managing what horrors you exposed squad members to, as those of a weaker disposition would lose their minds and go gun crazy or commit suicide. I think we pulled this off well. From speaking to fans of the game, they enjoy telling stories of great paranoia."

Topping off the trio of ambitious ideas the team planned for the game was the Infection System. As the entire story of *The Thing* revolves around an alien creature that infects humans and can perfectly replicate them, the game needed a robust system in place to pull this off. However, what started out as a dynamic system that sounds impressive even by today's standards ended up being something that was not as realised as any of the developers had initially hoped. Curtis explains the downgrade in the Infection System: "The Infection System was originally implemented as a dynamic system. There were a lot of factors determining whether a squad mate could become infected, namely a percentage chance when being attacked, and also when they were left



△×□ Keeping a close eye on your team members always puts you on edge. They could turn at any moment, so it's best to keep your flamethrower at the ready.

FOR ME, THE WHOLE PROJECT FELT LIKE FIGHTING THROUGH A BLIZZARD WITH A VAGUE IDEA OF WHERE WE WERE HEADING, BUT CONTINUOUSLY MEETING HUGE OBSTACLES THAT HAD TO BE OVERCOME



△○×□ During the game the player can find the frozen body of Childs, who was played by Keith David in the film. The bottle of whiskey he shared with MacReady is still beside him.

alone with an infected squad mate. This worked great for us in the early days of the project, but when we got the PS2 dev kits we quickly realised it would be difficult to collect a large team over time due to limitations in rendering lots of characters on screen. We added something we called 'infection triggers' eventually to slim down the squad numbers at set points in the game. The result was not so much a missed opportunity or worthy compromise, but more a case of getting away with it, as the majority of player were unaware of the triggers."

Campbell gives his take on the stripped-down system that made it into the finished version of the game: "I'd probably describe it as a reasonable first stab at it, but it is clearly quite flawed. During development there was this constant tension between infection as a dynamic system that players could interact with – e.g. perform blood tests – and a story-driven game where big set piece burst outs or deaths could make a cinematic event. The two are not easy bedfellows, and we never had a clear strategy on how to resolve this. We just sort of muddled through and reached a case-by-case

compromise in the end, which for most players worked well, but some would have felt cheated. I think a game system based on these concepts could be made that was much better than what we created, but we simply didn't have the time to iterate on it enough."

The question remains: does *The Thing* live up to the film that spawned it? Both critically and commercially the game was a hit, but Campbell and Curtis have a difference of opinion on whether their game was a worthy follow-up. Campbell explains his views on the title in saying, "I am immensely proud of the game. It was extremely innovative, and I think it holds up well against other games. I feel we also captured much of what was good about the film, especially the atmosphere. But *The Thing* is such a great movie that for a game to live up to it? Well... it would have to be a fucking amazing game! We were a pretty inexperienced team working on the game, and we completed the game in about two years – I think we were about 3-6 months later than we originally estimated. We tried to do far too many new and complex things at the same time within a very constrained development timeline. All these complexities multiplied, making the whole project impossible to predict and schedule accurately. Many systems had to be rewritten when it transpired that they didn't play nicely with other systems. We initially totally overestimated what the PS2 graphics would be capable of because of some wishful thinking and taking Sony's marketing hype too literally. The whole team was burnt out by the end but, as I say, we were young and inexperienced, and it created a great sense of camaraderie. I feel a special bond with everyone I worked with on that project."

△○×□ The clumsy boss battles in *The Thing* are clearly the game's weakest element. They are few and far between, but sadly break the excellent sense of tension the game dishes out.





△○× Later in the game, you'll find yourself going up against human foes. They prevent the alien from being over-used as the game's only enemy.

THE CHILDS AND MACREADY MYSTERY

What happened after the film's iconic ending?



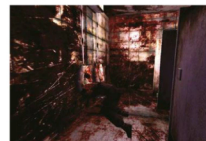
At the end of the film, the characters of Childs and MacReady are the sole survivors, but it ends on an ambiguous note as to whether they're both human or not. Childs' body can be found in the game, but MacReady is nowhere to be seen. As to how he envisioned what happened after the credits rolled on the film, Curtis says, "We discussed carrying forward the Childs/MacReady scene from the film, but decided its ambiguity was precious to the fans, so we didn't want to mess with it. We talked briefly about one aspect of the final scene – not being able to see Childs' breath, which could indicate Childs was infected – but didn't develop it. I like to think after the final scene they helped each other survive up to the point MacReady had to make a tough decision."

Curtis, on the other hand, views the game in a slightly more positive light. "I think we struck a good balance between the gameplay functions players expected at the time and the tension from the film. I'm really proud of the Fear/Trust and Infections System, and I believe we delivered on the paranoia we wanted players to feel. There was real depth in the AI that governed the squad, and it resulted in some crazy situations that surprised even us. Making a game attached to a film licence historically sucked [the exceptions at the time being *GoldenEye007* and *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*], but as there was no immovable deadline tied to a cinema release, and Universal/Black Label were really supportive of the things we wanted to do, it was given the space it needed. We even received an E3 award for best use of a movie licence, which was fantastic."

From creating a cross-platform engine in tandem with the actual game, shooting for brazen new ideas and concepts that might not fully work out, pushing past the expected completion schedule, all the while following up a beloved and highly regarded horror film, *The Thing* followed in line with John Carpenter's film in that it was birthed in a turbulent environment. While fans, and even Computer Artworks, are divided as to whether it is a worthy successor to the film, it tried the impossible. It may not have been the game it attempted to be, but what was released is a great title that makes players fear the very teammates who have their back, all the while forcing them to keep their flamethrower at the ready. Closing the book on *The Thing*, Campbell sums up his thoughts with a rather apt analogy. "For me, the whole project felt like fighting through a blizzard with a vague idea of where we were heading, but continuously meeting huge obstacles that had to be overcome. In this context it is hard to distinguish between a set back and just the way things were."



△○× The final boss goes for broke and pits you against a creature bigger than anything seen before, or since, in the franchise.



EXTENDED PLAY

SPIDER-MAN
GAMES

There has been a ton of them made over the years, but are any of them worth playing today?



ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

■ **TREYARCH DID SUCH** a fantastic job on *Spider-Man 2* that the team was quickly put to work on a sequel, *Ultimate Spider-Man*. An open-world adventure that offered an expanded New York City, improved mission variety, and iterated the core movement and combat. But it's perhaps the expressive visual style that helps enshrine this as legend; *Ultimate Spider-Man* arrived with gorgeous cel-shaded graphics that captured the feel of the comics. With a story written by Spidey scribe Brian Michael Bendis and the art style informed by artist Mark Bagley, this would prove to be one of the most authentic comic book games ever.



SPIDER-MAN

■ **MOST REMEMBER NEVERSOFT** for its work on Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, but 2000's *Spider-Man* would prove that the studio had far more to offer than skateboarding expertise. While it might look a little obsolete now, *Spider-Man* was a fast and fluid action game that really captured the spirit of the character. It felt like a game made by fans for fans, a game that revelled in the chaos of Spidey's adventures across a living and breathing New York City. This PlayStation classic effectively established the template that all modern Spider-Man games would follow, ensuring that any game bearing the Spider-Man name would need to come with a huge dose of personality to back up combat and traversal.



SPIDER-MAN 2

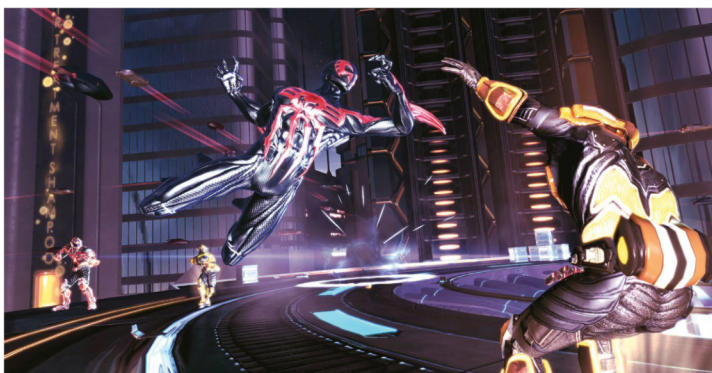
■ **WHAT CAN WE** say about *Spider-Man 2* that hasn't been written time and time again. Treyarch delivered a sensational Spider-Man game in 2004, capturing the feel and energy of his kinetic movement with ease, packing it into an open world that felt truly alive. It was an absolute delight to traverse Manhattan, swinging through an incredible recreation of NYC whilst battling criminals and completing a laundry list of vanilla side-missions. We can look back on *Spider-Man 2* fondly, as the game that proved web-swinging could work in a videogame and that movie tie-ins could be far more than a mere cash-grab.



SPIDER-MAN: WEB OF SHADOWS

■ **WHILE SO MANY** Spider-Man adventures have only grown staler with the passage of time, *Web Of Shadows* has had something of a resurgence in popularity in recent years. It wasn't received well at launch, though many reviewers failed to appreciate how well it represented the friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man. Its vision of New York City was ever-shifting and contorting as the adventure wound on,

the list of cameos from wider Marvel-U characters was impressively varied, and the combat would prove to be perfectly expressive of Peter's core power set and proficiencies. *Web Of Shadows* is a rather wonderful take on the Spider-Man universe, demonstrating how haphazard and ridiculous Spider-Man and his extensive rogues gallery really can be – he truly is the perfect character for a videogame!



SPIDER-MAN: SHATTERED DIMENSIONS

■ **WE ALWAYS HAD** a soft spot for *Shattered Dimensions*. Was it a little messy around the edges? It sure was, but perhaps that's to be expected for something as ambitious as this. The game pulled together Spider-Men from four different universes, using each to celebrate the history of the character in

a way that no other game has ever achieved. Thanks to its rich variety of villains, the awesome shifting visual style and the huge gameplay changes that were introduced between each version of the character ensured that *Shattered Dimensions* would always be one of the very best Spider-Man games ever made.

TROPHY GUIDE

PS PLUS TROPHY GUIDE



DEAD BY DAYLIGHT

PLATFORM: PS4 DIFFICULTY: 4/5

TROPHIES: 62 1 1 1 4 56

■ **IF WE WERE** to include the DLC packs there are close to 100 Trophies to be earned in *Dead By Daylight*, the four versus one horror game which pits survivors against a lone ruthless killer. We are, however, going to focus on the base game for the time being, and we suggest that you settle in for the long haul. Most of the Trophies require gradual grinding, earning during the natural course of play. That said, it is well worth keeping the Adept Killer (getting every Killer to level 20) and Survivor Trophies (getting each survivor to level 20) in mind as you begin to spend your blood points and choose a favourite character to play as. To get you started, it's well worth playing as Nea – her ability to utilise stealth is necessary in the early game – before switching over to natural healer Claudette. As for the Killers, well, just go wild! They are all pretty awesome, to be perfectly honest.



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

PLATFORM: PSVR DIFFICULTY: 2/5

TROPHIES: 47 1 1 2 9 35

■ **THIS FUN TRIVIA** game isn't really designed for Trophy hunting, but should you get a solid group of friends together (between 2-6 can jump on the PlayLink app to directly participate) you'll find that they will all come soon enough. Most of the Trophies are linked to winning games with a pre-defined number of players in the game, and for using Power Plays. The rest are, of course, gifted to you for answering trivia questions correctly. What we are trying to say is that if you think you are pretty smart this will all be a breeze – if you're a little trivia-adverse, on the other hand, you should probably expect this to be a nightmare! Still, it is all fun and games. Get your phones charged, get your friends over and settle in for a good time.





MAFIA III

PLATFORM: PS4 DIFFICULTY: 2/5

TROPHIES: 56 1 1 1 4 50

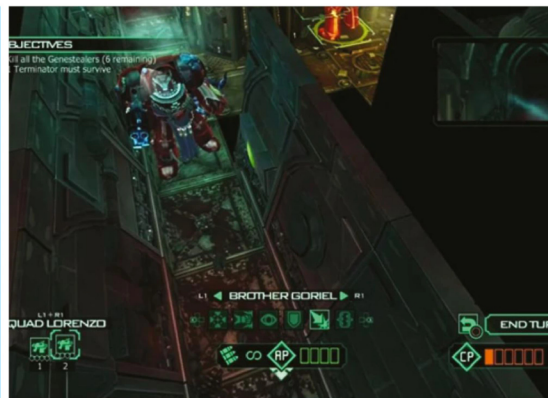
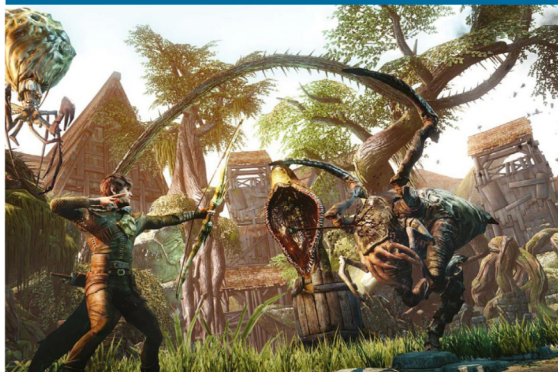
■ **THERE IS** A fairly good chance that you skipped over *Mafia III* when it first released, which is a shame because it's pretty awesome. Well, thank the gaming gods for PlayStation Plus then, are we right?! Of course we are. Not only is this clever 70s-set, open-world action game wonderfully fun it also features some pretty easy to obtain Trophies too. Sure, it's going to take you 50(ish) hours to get the Platinum, but you'll find that time flies by once you begin getting into the game proper. You'll want to focus – for your first playthrough – on flipping all Racket Informant and Boss characters onto your side. As you do, be sure to distribute the districts evenly between the main Underbosses to keep them content and on your side – do *not* let any of these characters die. Once you've done all of this, you'll need to focus on a second playthrough effectively murdering everything in your sight. Kill everybody, assign all of the districts to a single Underboss, and act like a total asshole should anybody question your authority. This is probably the fastest way to playthrough the game, but it is the least interesting of the two options.

BOUND BY FLAME

PLATFORM: PS3 DIFFICULTY: 4/5

TROPHIES: 42 1 3 9 29

■ **IF YOU ARE** after some quick and easy Trophies this probably isn't going to be the game for you. While *Bound By Flame* isn't necessarily all that difficult – it's a fairly tame fantasy RPG by its very design – it is an almighty time sink. You are going to need to play through this thing at least three times, requiring varying degrees of difficulty shifts throughout. The reason for the three playthroughs is that there are nine missable trophies and a handful tied to core-gameplay elements such as skill trees, seduction, killing and crafting. Trying to pick all of these up in just two runs is practically impossible (or more trouble than it is worth at any rate).



SPACE HULK

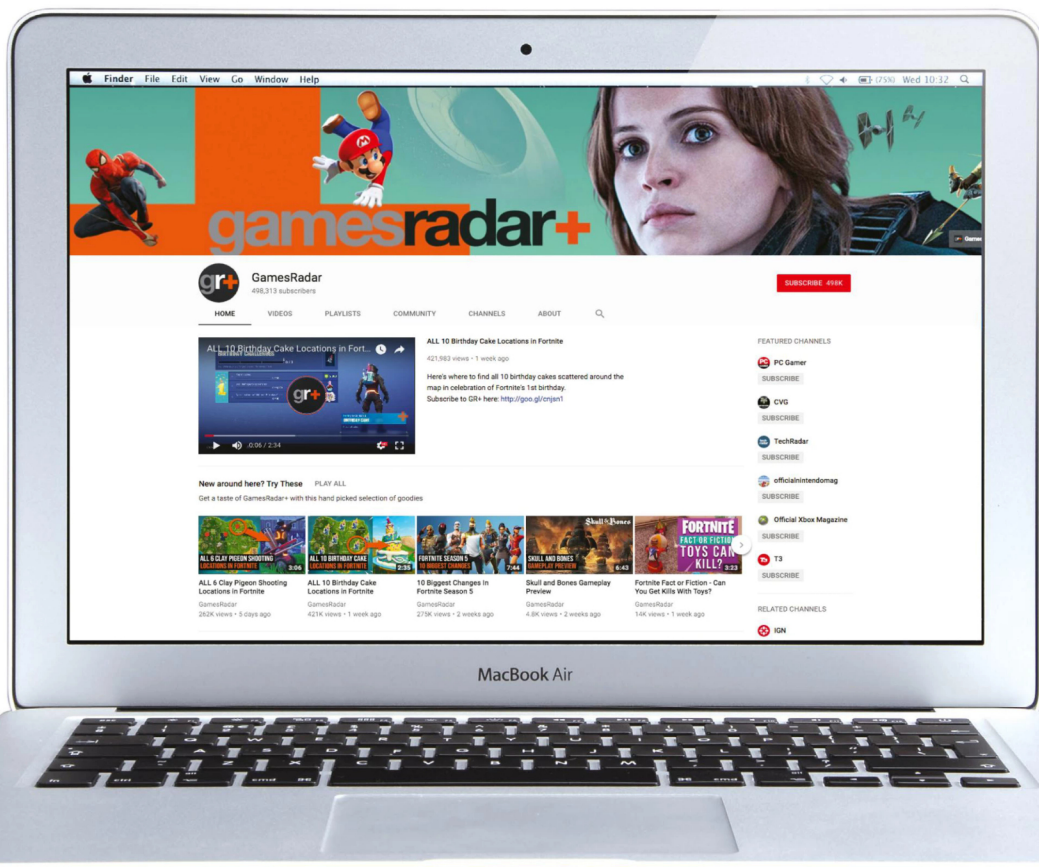
PLATFORM: PS VITA DIFFICULTY: 2/5

TROPHIES: 31 1 1 5 15 10

■ **THAT'S RIGHT, THE** Warhammer 40K classic is coming and, well, time has made it no less punishing. To be fair, *Space Hulk* is pretty easy going once you get the hang of it although you may want to steer clear of attempting a Hard difficulty run on your first time. To make the mission specific Trophies a little easier to obtain, we would recommend that you actually play through the game twice. The first you should run a Normal mode save, using this opportunity to take advantage of the excess of Command Points and unlimited time to plan attacks. Once you've wrapped, take a second sprint through the game on Hard using everything you've learned.

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FORTNITE: BATTLE ROYALE



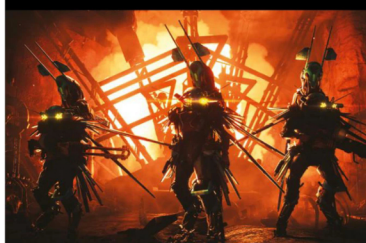
YES, WE KNOW. Even more *Fortnite: Battle Royale* for your eyes to digest. Gamesradar is literally bursting with tips guides.

NO MAN'S SKY



INTERESTED IN DIPPING back into *No Man's Sky* now that the NEXT update is live? Here are the hottest changes you should expect to find.

UPCOMING PS4 GAMES



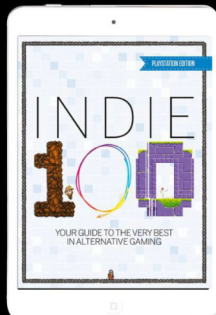
ARE YOU EXCITED about the games coming to PS4 in 2019? Gamesradar has put a handy list together, showcasing the very best.

SHARING



PLAYSTATION 4 DIRECTORY

Every PS4 owner needs to know what games are worth owning. Our PS4 directory is the ideal tool for building your library.



THE INDIE 100

Every must-play indie game on PlayStation is right here – if you love indies, this will help you fill any gaps in your collection.



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■ PS4'S Community feature is a great way of finding like-minded players that share your interests. That's why we've set up our own **Play** Community where you can join our game sessions, share your best screenshots, win free games and other prizes, and connect with other PlayStation fans. Come and join our ever-growing community of readers today!

HOW TO JOIN

1 Search for Play_Mag_UK in the Friends menu, select our profile, then navigate down to 'Communities'.

2 Press X to open the Play Community, then press X again to join it. Welcome to the family!

SEND US YOUR BEST SCREENS



ΔΟΧ The game is looking better and better by the month, so get to work and show us your very best No Man's Sky captures!



ΔΟΧ We need help. For the love of god, please share your best Dead Cells builds with us.



ΔΟΧ Season five of Fortnite is bringing big changes to the world, and we want to see all of the weird stuff that you have found.

YOU HAVEN'T
PLAYED...?

DEAD CELLS

One of the very best indie games of the year just landed on PS4 and it's so challenging that it'll have you launching your controller across the room within the hour. It's totally worth it.



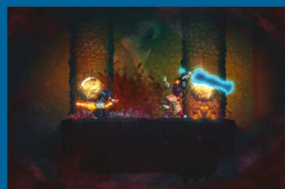
■ **THERE'S SOMETHING UTTERLY** enticing to the simplicity of *Dead Cells*' core concept, to the complexity that is buried beneath it all. On the surface, it looks entirely retro-grade, a side-scrolling roguelike with a familiar pixel-art visual style, its complex levels crafted from the same cloth as *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. Though the truth is that there is so much more to this game than its influences alone; *Dead Cells* is one of the best independent releases of the year, with its expertly honed controls and wildly engaging combat loop ensuring that we haven't been able to comfortably put this one down for weeks.

The basic idea behind *Dead Cells* is that must collect cells to keep your decomposing body animated, with

death essentially ripping you of all of your progression and dropping you off back at the beginning of the game – so far, so roguelike. But it's as you weave further and further in through progressively punishing (and ever-shifting, thanks to the procedural-generation) stages that the magic begins to reveal itself. As you gain new items, weapons and skills your desire to stay alive – to push just a little further forward through the adventure – will leave you on the edge of your seat, treating each and every encounter as if it might be your last. *Dead Cells* is punishing, but it rewards you for your perseverance; it's the type of game that will demand your attention and, well, you should wholeheartedly sacrifice all of it without hesitation.

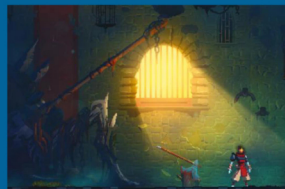
THE BEST BITS

What makes *Absolver* to unique?



THE FLEXIBILITY

Create different builds and tackle the game's sprawling sandbox in any way that you want to.



THE DIFFICULTY

Prepare to get your ass kicked over and over again. It'll take just a few hits to kill you, forcing you to start over.



THE WORLD

The procedural-generation is incredibly impressive, continually creating awesome levels to explore

FOR PEOPLE WHO ♥ RETRO GAMES

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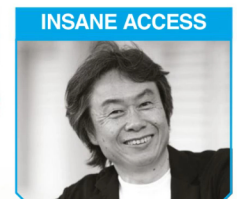


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PLAY PLUS PlayList

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT A GAME SCORED THEN THESE PAGES ARE FOR YOU

LET'S PLAY... OFFICE FAVOURITES



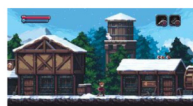
THE BANNER SAGA 3

Stoic has delivered one hell of a finale in *The Banner Saga 3*. This brings the long-running strategy series to a close and it has done so in an impressive fashion. FYI: Make sure you play the other two games before you jump into this one.



DEAD CELLS

At first we were a little torn on *Dead Cells*. It's a pretty punishing rogue-like that was kicking our arses pretty heavily. But the longer we spend with it, the more it's magic reveals itself to us. Seriously, make sure you give this one a try.



CHASM

Inspired by classic hack 'n slash dungeon crawlers and Metroidvania-style platformers, *Chasm* is a pretty smart procedurally-generated adventure game that has had us enthralled for weeks! We are still working on a review, so check back next month.



THE COUNCIL

We've been quietly enjoying *The Council*. The first season seems to be releasing slowly, but it is proving to be a welcomed alternative to the Telltale adventure games. If you too are after something a little different we recommend that you give Episode One a little try.

PS4

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Absolver	286	7
Abzu	273	7
Agents Of Mayhem	286	4
Alekhine's Gun	270	3
Alien: Isolation	249	9
Alienation	270	8
Amplitude	266	8
Arizona Sunshine	285	5
Arslan: The Warriors Of Legend	268	5
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China	257	7
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India	266	7
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	237	8
Assassin's Creed Syndicate	264	4
Assassin's Creed: Unity	251	6
A Way Out	293	8
Axiom Verge	256	9
Batman: Arkham Knight	258	9
Batman: The Telltale Series – Episode One	274	4
Battle Chasers: Nightwar	287	5
Battleborn	271	6
Battlefield 1	276	7
Battlefield 4	238	8
Battlefield Hardline	256	7
BioShock: The Collection	275	7
Black The Fall	284	5
Blazblue Central Fiction	277	8
Blazblue Chronophantasma Extend	264	9
Bloodborne	256	9
Bloodborne: The Old Hunters	265	9
Bound	274	7
Bound By Flame	245	6
Broforce	268	6
Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare	251	8
Call Of Duty: Black Ops III	264	8
Call Of Duty: Ghosts	238	7
Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare	276	5
Celeste	292	9
Child Of Light	244	7
Conan Exiles	295	8
Crash Bandicoot: N. Sane Trilogy	284	8
DariusBurst: Chronicle Saviours	266	8
Dark Souls III	269	9
Day Of The Tentacle Remastered	269	8
Daylight	242	2
Dead Nation: Apocalypse Edition	242	7
Dead Or Alive 5: Last Round	254	7
Destiny	249	9
Destiny: Rise Of Iron	275	8
Destiny: The Taken King	262	9
Destiny 2	286	8
Detroit: Become Human	295	8
Deus Ex: Mankind Divided	274	6
Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition	258	8
Diablo III: Reaper Of Souls	248	9
Dirt 4	284	9
Dirt Rally	269	9
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Disney Infinity 2.0	249	8
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Divinity: Original Sin Enhanced Edition	264	8
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Dragon Ball Xenoverse	255	5
Dragon Ball FighterZ	291	9
Dragon Quest Builders	276	8
Dragon Quest Heroes	263	8
Dragon Quest Heroes 2	283	6
Drawn To Death	281	6
Driveclub	250	8
Dying Light	254	9
Dynasty Warriors 9	293	5
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Enter The Gungeon	269	8

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
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Everybody's Gone To The Rapture	261	8
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Evolve	254	6
Extinction	294	4
Fallout 4	264	9
Far Cry 4	251	8
Far Cry 5	293	7
Far Cry Primal	268	8
Farpoint	283	8
Fez	243	10
Fe	293	6
FIFA 16	262	9
FIFA 17	275	8
Final Fantasy Type-0	255	8
Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn	243	9
Final Fantasy XV	277	9
Firewatch	267	6
Forgotton Anne	294	6
Furi	272	8
Game Of Thrones: Iron From Ice	253	8
Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions	252	9
Get Even	284	7
Ghost Recon: Wildlands	280	5
Gnag	283	7
God Of War	294	9
God Of War III Remastered	260	8
Grand Theft Auto V	251	10
Gravity Rush 2	279	8
Grim Fandango Remastered	254	8
Guilty Gear Xrd -Revelator-	272	9
Guilty Gear Xrd REV 2	283	9
Guilty Gear Xrd -SIGN-*	253	9
Guitar Hero Live	264	8
Hand Of Fate 2	289	8
Headlander	273	6
Heavenly Sword: Sacrifice	285	8
Hellblade: Zero Dawn	289	5
Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice	268	9
Hidamari	248	8
Hohokum	248	8
Homefront: The Revolution	271	6
Horizon: Zero Dawn	279	9
Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number	255	9
I Am Setsuna	273	8
Infamous: First Light	249	5
Infamous: Second Son	242	8
Injustice 2	283	8
Invisible, Inc.	270	9
Just Cause 3	265	7
JStars Victory VS+	260	6
Jurassic World Evolution	296	5
Killing Floor 2	277	6
Killzone Shadow Fall	238	8
Kingdom Come Deliverance	292	4
King Of Fighters XIV	274	7
King's Quest: A Knight To Remember	261	8
Knack	238	6
Knack 2	286	5
Lawbreakers	286	7
Laser League	296	9
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Lego Dimensions	263	7
Lego Marvel Super Heroes	238	8
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Little Nightmares	282	8
Life Is Strange: Before The Storm	290	8
LittleBigPlanet 3	251	9
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Lumo	271	7
Madden 16	262	8
Madden 17	274	9
Mad Max	262	4
Mafia 3	276	8
Marvel Vs. Capcom: Infinite	287	6
Mass Effect: Andromeda	281	5

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Matterfall	285	6
Mercenary Kings	244	8
Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	242	8
Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain	261	9
Metal Gear Survive	292	5
Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor	250	8
Middle-earth: Shadow Of War	287	7
Moonlighter	296	8
Milanoir	296	3
Minit	294	8
Mirror's Edge: Catalyst	272	6
Monster Hunter World	291	7
Mortal Kombat X	257	9
Murdered: Soul Suspect	246	4
N++	261	8
NBA 2K17	275	8
Need For Speed Payback	289	4
Need For Speed Rivals	238	8
NHL 15	249	6
Nidhogg 2	286	7
Nier Automata	280	8
Nioh	279	8
No Man's Sky	274	8
Not A Hero	267	6
Nuclear Throne	266	8
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Octodad: Dadliest Catch	244	6
OnRush	296	8
Outlast	241	7
Outlast 2	282	8
Overcooked	273	9
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Oxenfree	271	6
Pac-Man Championship Edition 2	275	6
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Planet Of The Apes: Last Frontier	290	5
Plants Vs Zombies: Garden Warfare 2	268	8
Prey	282	7
Prison Architect	273	8
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Rainbow Six Siege	265	8
Ratchet & Clank	269	8
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Resident Evil HD	253	8
Resident Evil 7	279	9
Resident Evil Revelations 2	256	7
Resogun	238	9
Resogun Heroes	247	9
Rime	284	6
Robinson: The Journey	277	6
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Rocket League	260	8
Rogue Legacy	248	9
Salt And Sanctuary	269	8
Sebastian Loeb Rally Evo	267	5
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Shantae: Half-Genie Hero	279	8
Sheltered	270	9
Sherlock Holmes: The Devil's Daughter	272	6
Shinsetsu: The Lightning Kingdom	282	8
Shovel Knight	258	9
Skylanders Imaginators	276	7
Skylanders Swap Force	238	7
Skylanders Trap Team	250	7
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Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3	282	5
SOMA	262	8
Songbringer	287	7
Mad Max	262	4
Sonic Forces	289	7

THIS MONTH'S NEW ENTRIES

The newest games, freshly
squeezed among all your
old favourites

The Awesome Adventures Of Captain Spirit	7
Unravel Two	7
Lego The Incredibles	5
The Crew 2	5
Earthless	4

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Star Ocean: Integrity And Faithlessness	273	6
Star Wars Battlefront	265	6
Star Wars Battlefront II	289	6
Statik	282	8
Star Trek: Bridge Crew	284	8
Street Fighter V	267	9
Styx: Shards Of Darkness	280	6
Super Time Force Ultra	262	9
Switch Galaxy Ultra	253	6
Syberia 3	283	6
Tales From The Borderlands: Zer0 Sum	252	7
Tales Of Berseria	279	7
Tearaway Unfolded	262	7
Tekken 7	284	8
Teslagrad	253	7
The Banner Saga 2	272	8
The Binding Of Isaac: Rebirth	251	9
The Crew 2	297	5
The Escapists 2	286	7
The Evil Within	250	8
The Last Guardian	278	6
The Last Of Us Remastered	247	10
The Order: 1886	254	8
The Surge	283	7
The Sims 4	290	6
The Swords Of Ditto	294	6
The Vanishing Of Ethan Carter	260	8
The Walking Dead Season 3 E1&2	278	8
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt	257	10
The Witness	267	10
The Awesome Adventures Of Captain Spirit	297	7
Thimbleweed Park	285	7
This War Of Mine: The Little Ones	267	7
Titan Souls	257	7
Titanfall 2	276	7
Tom Clancy's The Division	268	9
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5	263	8
Torment: Tides Of Numenera	280	8
Touken Den	281	8
TrackMania Turbo	269	8
Transformers: Devastation	263	8
Transistor	245	9
Trials Fusion	244	8
Ultra Street Fighter IV	258	8
Umbrella Corps	272	8
Uncharted 4: A Thief's End	270	10
Uncharted: The Lost Legacy	285	9
Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection	263	8
Unravel Two	297	7
Until Dawn	261	8
Vampyr	296	4
Valiant Hearts	247	6
Virginia	275	8
Warhammer 40K: Deathwatch	280	7
Wasteland 2: Director's Cut	264	8
Watch Dogs	245	8
Watch Dogs 2	278	7
What Remains Of Edith Finch	283	9
Windjammers	287	6
Wolfenstein: The New Order	245	8
Wolfenstein: The Old Blood	258	8
Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap	283	7
XCOM 2	275	9
Yakuza 0	279	9
Yakuza 6: The Song Of Life	293	7
Yoku's Island Express	295	7
Yoku-Laylee	281	6

PS3



3D Dot Game Heroes	192	8
50 Cent: Blood On The Sand	177	7
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	211	7
The Adventures Of Tintin	212	5
Alice: Madness Returns	207	6
Aliens: Colonial Marines	230	4

Aliens Vs Predator	189	7
Alpha Protocol	193	8
Army	215	6
Arcana Heart 3	207	7
Armored Core V	217	6
Army Of Two	164	8
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	188	6
Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel	231	4
Assassin's Creed	161	5
Assassin's Creed II	186	9
Assassin's Creed III	225	7
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	199	9
Assassin's Creed: Revelations	212	7
Assassin's Creed: Rogue	251	7
Asura's Wrath	216	7
Atelier Ayesha: The Alchemist Of Dust	230	6
Batman: Arkham Asylum	183	8
Batman: Arkham City	211	9
Batman: Arkham Origins	237	8
Battle Fantasia	176	7
Battlefield 1943	182	9
Battlefield: Bad Company	168	8
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	190	9
Battlefield 3	212	8
BattleShip	219	4
Bayonetta*	187	9
The Beatles: Rock Band	184	9
Beat Hazard Ultra	213	7
Beat Sketcher	201	8
Beyond Good & Evil HD	207	8
Beyond: Two Souls	236	7
Binary Domain	216	7
Bionic Commando	179	8
Bionic Commando Rearmed	169	8
Bionic Commando Rearmed 2	203	6
BioShock	172	9
BioShock 2	189	8
BioShock Infinite	230	9
BlackSite	163	4
Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War	160	5
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	190	8
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift	198	9
Blur	193	8
Borderlands	185	8
Borderlands 2	223	9
Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel	250	6
The Bourne Conspiracy	168	7
Braid	188	9
Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons	233	8
Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway	171	7
Brutal Legend	185	7
Bulletstorm	203	8
The Bureau: XCOM Declassified	235	5
Burnout Paradise	162	8
Call Of Duty 3	151	5
Call Of Duty: World At War	173	6
Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	160	9
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	186	9
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	212	8
Call Of Duty: Black Ops	199	9
Call Of Duty: Black Ops II	226	8
Call Of Juarez: Bound In Blood	181	8
Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger	232	8
Call Of Juarez: The Cartel	208	3
Captain America: Super Soldier	208	7
Castle Crashers	200	9
Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair	212	7
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow	197	9
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow 2	241	8
Catherine	215	6
Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena	178	8
Civilization Revolution	168	9
Clive Barker's Jericho	159	6
The Club	163	8
Colin McRae: DIRT	158	9
Colin McRae: DIRT 2	184	8
Conan	160	7
Condemned 2	165	7

Costume Quest	199	7
Counter Strike: Global Offensive	223	9
Crysis 2	204	7
Crysis 3	230	6
Damage Inc: Pacific Squadron WWII	223	8
Dante's Inferno	189	8
The Darkness	154	9
The Darkness II	215	7
Dark Sector	165	6
Dark Souls	211	9
Dark Souls II	242	9
Darkstalkers Resurrection	230	8
Dark Void	188	8
Darksiders	188	8
Darksiders II	221	8
DC Universe Online	202	8
Dead Or Alive 5	223	7
Dead Island	210	7
Dead Island: Riptide	231	6
Dead Rising 2	197	8
Dead Space	172	9
Dead Space 2	201	9
Dead Space 3	228	7
Deadly Premonition: The Director's Cut	231	8
Deadpool	233	6
Demon's Souls	193	9
Destroy All Humans: Path Of The Furon	178	2
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	209	9
Devil May Cry 4	163	9
Devil May Cry HD Collection	217	8
DIRT 3	206	8
DIRT Showdown	219	7
Dishonored	224	9
Disney Infinity	235	8
DJ Hero	186	9
DJ Hero 2	198	8
Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock	220	3
DomC Devil May Cry	227	9
Dragon Age: Origins	186	8
Dragon Age II	203	6
Dragon's Crown	235	8
Dragon's Dogma	218	8
Driver: San Francisco	209	7
Duke Nukem Forever	207	3
Dungeon Siege III	206	8
Dynasty Warriors 8	234	7
EA Sports MMA	198	8
Eat Lead	178	3
echochrome	169	8
EDF: Insect Armageddon	208	6
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	152	9
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	212	9
Elefunk	170	4
El Shaddai: Ascension Of The Metatron	208	7
Enslaved: Odyssey To The West	197	8
Eric Mickey 2: The Power Of Two	226	5
Eternal Sonata	176	8
Everybody's Golf: World Tour	165	9
Fallout 3	173	10
Fallout: New Vegas	198	8
Fantastic Four: Rise Of The Silver Surfer	155	3
Far Cry 2	172	7
Far Cry 3	226	8
Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon	231	8
FEAR	151	8
FEAR 2: Project Origin	176	8
FEAR 3	208	6
Fight Night Champion	203	8
Fight Night Round 4	181	8
Final Fantasy XIII	190	8
Final Fantasy XIII-2	214	8
Final Fantasy XIII: Lightning Returns	240	8
Fist Of The North Star: Ken's Rage	198	5
Folklore	158	6
Front Mission Evolved	198	5
Fuse	232	7

*denotes import review

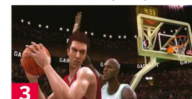
TEN YEARS AGO BEST REVIEWS (170)



NHL 09 (88%)



Madden NFL 09 (83%)



NBA Live 09 (81%)



Monster Madness (78%)



R-Type Tactics (74%)



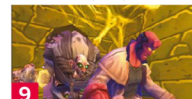
Ratchet & Clank: QFB (69%)



Siren: Blood Curse (62%)



FaceBreaker (55%)



Hellboy (48%)



International Athletics (40%)

PLAY'S BEST GAMES IF YOU LOVE...



SHOOTING GUNS

PLAY: LAWBREAKERS

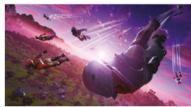
The game may have been abandoned by its publisher, but there is still a lot to love about this innovative arena shooter. There is still a small and dedicated community keeping the servers active.



KILLING ZOMBIES

PLAY: RESIDENT EVIL 2

We are pretty bloody excited about the remake of *Resident Evil 2*. We are also super impatient. We dusted off our PlayStation and gave this classic another spin. It still totally holds up – it's well worth your time.



STALKING PEOPLE

PLAY: FORTNITE

If you stop attempting to win and instead just focus on being a total nuisance to everybody you spot from across the map you'll find that you actually have a really, really good time.



INDIE CLASSICS

PLAY: OVERCOOKED

If you have a summer house party coming up you really should get your self four controllers synced up and a copy of *Overcooked* installed. It's one of the best same-couch co-op games ever made.



CHALLENGING YOURSELF

PLAY: ALIEN ISOLATION

Listen, we know that *Alien Isolation* is fantastic but it's also a nightmare, particularly once you begin to ramp the difficulty up. This will likely break you, in ways that you never imagined were even possible. Good luck.


GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Genji: Days Of The Blade	151	3
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	157	8
Ghost Recon Future Soldier	219	6
GI Joe	183	2
The Godfather	151	3
The Godfather II	178	4
God Of War III	190	9
God Of War: Ascension	230	9
God Of War Collection*	188	9
God Of War Collection: Volume II	210	7
Gotham City Imposters	216	7
Gran Turismo 5	200	8
Gran Turismo 6	239	8
Grand Theft Auto IV	166	9
Grand Theft Auto V	236	10
Greed Corp	191	7
Grid 2	232	7
Grid Autosport	246	6
GTA: Episodes From Liberty City	191	9
Guardians Of Middle-earth	227	7
Guitar Hero III	160	9
Guitar Hero 5	184	8
Guitar Hero Greatest Hits	182	7
Guitar Hero Metallica	179	8
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	189	6
Guitar Hero: Warriors Of Rock	197	7
Guitar Hero World Tour	173	9
Gundemonium Collection	197	8
Gunstar Heroes	181	8
Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince	182	6
Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix	155	3
Haze	167	6
Heavenly Sword	157	7
Heavy Rain	189	9
Heavy Weapon	187	7
Heroes Over Europe	184	4
Hitman: Absolution	225	9
Hitman HD Trilogy	230	7
Homefront	203	6
The House Of The Dead 4	218	8
The House Of The Dead: Overkill	212	7
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	207	5
Hustle Kings	190	8
Hyperdimension Neptunia	202	2
I Am Alive	217	6
Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus HD	210	9
The Incredible Hulk	168	5
infamous	180	8
infamous 2	207	8
Inferno Pool	181	8
Injustice: Gods Among Us	231	8
Inversion	220	4
Iron Man	166	5
Iron Man 2	193	5
The Jak And Daxter Trilogy	216	8
Jak And Daxter: The Lost Frontier	187	5
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	199	6
James Cameron's Avatar: The Game	187	6
JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All Star Battle	244	8
Journey	216	9
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	159	7
Jurassic Park: The Game	194	6
Just Cause 2	190	8
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	160	7
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	196	7
Katamari Forever	184	8
Kick-Ass The Game	194	6
Killer Is Dead	235	7
Killzone 2	176	9
Killzone 3	202	8
Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMix	236	8
Kingdom Hearts 2.5 HD ReMix	252	9
Kingdoms Of Amalur: Reckoning	215	7
The King Of Fighters XII	182	7
The King Of Fighters XIII	213	8
Kung Fu Panda 2	207	2
LA Noire	206	9
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light	198	9
The Last Guy	171	9
Last Rebellion	191	4
Legend Of Spyro: Dawn Of The Dragon	174	5
Legendary	173	6
Lego Batman	173	6
Lego Batman 2	221	8
Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	194	7
Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7	213	6

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	167	7
Lego Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues	187	7
Lego Pirates Of The Caribbean	206	7
Lego Rock Band	187	8
Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	160	7
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	204	8
Lego The Lord Of The Rings	227	7
Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust	180	2
Limbo	209	9
LittleBigPlanet	172	9
LittleBigPlanet 2	201	10
LittleBigPlanet: Karting	225	8
Lollipop Chainsaw	221	7
London 2012	221	4
The Lord Of The Rings: Aragorn's Quest	199	6
The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest	175	5
The Lord Of The Rings: War In The North	213	4
Lost Planet 2	192	8
Lost Planet 3	236	5
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	163	6
Madagascar 3	224	3
Madden NFL 12	209	8
Madden NFL 13	223	8
Mafia II	196	8
Magic: Duels Of The Planeswalkers	202	8
Marvel Vs Capcom 2	182	9
Marvel Vs Capcom 3	202	8
Marvel Ultimate Alliance	151	6
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2	185	6
Max Payne 3	219	7
Mass Effect 2	201	10
Mass Effect 3	216	9
Medal Of Honor	198	8
Medal Of Honor Airborne	161	8
Medal Of Honor: Warfighter	225	7
Mega Man 9	172	7
Mega Man 10	192	8
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	171	7
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	228	9
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance is another world-class entry in gaming's most fundamentally playable genre.		
Metal Gear Solid 4	167	9
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection	214	9
Metro: Last Light	231	6
Michael Jackson: The Experience	205	5
Microbot	202	5
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	173	8
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WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...

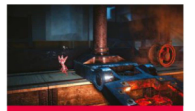
Watch out! Games!



WHAT
(have they been playing?)
No Man's Sky
WHY (was it chosen?)
Better than ever

JOSH WEST

I CONTINUE to be incredibly impressed by the way in which Hello Games has approached the ongoing development of *No Man's Sky*. Its evolution over the last 12 months has been nothing short of spectacular, with the team working hard to implement everything from better procedural-generation (to improve the variety of its worlds) to adding requested features such as multiplayer, unlimited building and third-person perspective options to greatly improve the core experience. The game that exists now is still fundamentally familiar, but the wider experience has evolved exponentially. The most recent update, NEXT, has only helped to solidify *No Man's Sky* as one of the most misunderstood and interesting games on the market.



WHAT
(have they been playing?)
Unravel Two
WHY (was it chosen?)
Pulling on threads

JON GORDON

I DIDN'T REALLY connect with the original *Unravel*. There was just something a little off about it, a little too light, a little too much style over substance. I'm not sure that this sequel is really all that different, but the balance does feel a lot better. The new co-op mechanics work really well and offer some engaging new puzzle design. But still, it's a light experience that feels like it's lacking a little something to make it great.

*denotes import review

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